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[IN THE TOILS.]

FATE.

By the Author of "Nickelboy's Christmas-Box,"
"Maurice Durant," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XLIX.

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale.

Men's vows are women's traitors. *Shakespeare.*

DUSK was closing in upon Rivershall, and the little stoned parlour of the "Rivershall Arms" was nearly in darkness—in silence too, for the few labourers taking their evening draught of home-brewed at the little bar spoke but little, and that little in the curt, low tones of their class.

Occasionally the echo of a gruff guffaw reached the parlour, and one of them, louder than the rest, met with a response in the shape of an impatient movement and a half-muttered curse from the lips of a man sitting by the deal table, and gazing at the fast-dying fire.

Roused by the last guffaw the solitary figure rose, took up the poker and stirred the embers into a blaze. Then he resumed his seat and his attitude, one of meditation, moodily expressed by the drooped head and listless hand, that hung over the table and seemed bloodless, so white it shone in the firelight.

White too was the face, a marvellous one as faces went—large, handsome, and, above all, masterful; but now as the flicker lit it up for a moment, then, dying, let it rest in darkness for the next, to light it up again and again with each reviving flame, what a story appeared written upon it!

What dark hollows lay beneath the black, piercing eyes! what deeply scored lines across the white forehead! and, more noticeable than all, with what a weary, restless, dissatisfied and insatiable droop the thin lips were curved!

A grand face! one to cause a shudder and a sigh, for it was the wreck of a splendid one, the index of a restless heart ever smouldering with hate and revengeful desire.

Who could write down the thoughts that went

coursing like grim spectres through the toiling brain, deepening the lines and hollows and tightening the thin lips?—thoughts that would find utterance, so thickly they thronged, and in the old fashion in which Melchior the forger and schemer indulged, this man, twitching the long, lean fingers of the white, overhanging hand, mutters to the fire.

He would fain let the past lie, but he cannot. In that darkened room he must go over it all again, and he does so. He looks back upon the days when he was young, hopeful, and ardent, in the pride and glory of youth, with a career self-planned and sternly resolved. He remembers the day, the place where he met the vicar's beautiful daughter, the beautiful Leonora. He remembers the first words they spoke, the place they were spoken, and he remembers, even now with a thrill and a flush, the sweetly breathed vows that were, alas, so soon broken.

And now, as his mind comes to this portion of his journey, the white hand clenches and he scowls at the fire with eyes that seem to outshine it.

How well he can picture the old wrinkled form of the man who tempted and won her from him—Sir William Melville, of Rivershall! He cursed the name when first he heard it, and he vowed to work the old man who had bought his bride evil unto death.

And now the white hand, like a tiger's tongue, stretches to the blaze, and a smile, sinister and fiendish, crosses his lips.

No general could have marshalled his force of ten thousand better than the penniless tutor had marshalled his wits, and with them got his revenge.

Where was Sir William Melville now? In his grave. Where were the rest of his hated race? Buried from the world and in his hands. Where was Lady Melville, the girl Leonora, who had sold herself and played him false for a title and a manor? Where but at Rivershall, as much in his power and beneath his feet as the sand he grinds with his heel?

Oh, his revenge is not yet complete, and now as he sits at the fire he tries to sweeten it with ambition. His tool, his love-slave had poured a drop of exqui-

site nectar into his cup of unholy bliss. He would be master of Rivershall, but not in her way.

"Poor Kate!" he muttered, "poor Kate! It will go hard with her; but she will suffer and be strong, if not—well, she must suffer."

He rose and rang the bell.

"Lights, good woman, and some wine."

They brought him the lights and a bottle of wine.

"He has ordered it for the good of the house, and but sips a little of it without enjoyment. Wine had lost its generous savour for him with most of this world's gifts, and he took them mechanically.

Before he had sunk back into the old attitude the door opened and Kate Lucas glided in. A look of pain flashed across her face as she came to his side, and in a low voice she said:

"I am late, are you not angry?"

"No, Kate," he said, looking up at her with a smile, and holding out the white hand. "No, it is not in me to be angry to-night."

She took the hand and caressed it with doglike affection and sighed.

"It is red hot," she said.

"Ay," he said, nodding at the fire. "You would say it was too warm for a fire, Kate, and I have been roasting here."

She shook her head.

"The fire is inside," she said, gravely, and with another sigh. "You have the feverish fit on you to-night."

"I have," he said, with a short laugh, "dreadfully. My heart beats like a furnace and my head is filled with fire, and yet, Kate, I have not been drinking, as you see," and he lifted the bottle to the light.

She stood before the fire, looking into it uneasily.

"You laugh at me if I say 'see a doctor!'"

"Ay," he said, laughing, "or better still I walk to the looking-glass, and do as you wish. I see a doctor then you know."

"Hush," she said, looking round. "Do you think detection is impossible? Are there no wise heads an-

sharp eyes here that will recognise in you the well-known Dr. Brownell?"

"No," he said. "Look at me. I smooth my face and all the wrinkles go, I smile and I am young again. Besides, where is the slight limp, the long, dark hair, the doctor's stoop? All gone, not a trace of them left, and I am quite another person."

The slight effort required to effect the changes on his countenance seemed to rouse him, and with a lighter step he rose and stood by her side, poked the fire, and, looking into her face, said:

"Well, you are patient as of old, Kate. You don't ask why and for what I sent for you."

She smiled.

"I want you to go to London," he said.

"To London?" she repeated.

He nodded.

"Yes, and if need be to Calais."

Her face grew pale.

"Why?" she said.

"To wait for me," he said.

Her face as rapidly brightened, and he could hear that her breath came fast.

"To wait for you," she said. "Are you not jesting?"

"No, sweet Kate," he replied. "I am in sober earnest. Give me your hand that I may see if I can make it burn as you say mine does. Listen. I have been thinking, sweet girl, and I am convinced that I have had enough of all this work. My revenge is complete; look round and say if it's not so. I am tired and weary of it. I would be at rest—at rest and peace, in some softer, milder clime, in my dear Italy; there in a hill-nestled valley, perfumed with the vine, and golden with an Italian sun, I would be at peace with my Kate—"

A cry of delight that would break forth stopped him. She trembled from head to foot, and the hand as he had prophesied, burnt like fire.

"Are you deceiving me, Melchior?" she breathed, fixing her gray eyes, all alight, upon his face, that seemed wrapped in a peaceful smile. "Are you painting a fancy picture to make me weep or is it really to be? Oh, Melchior, for a week of such happiness I feel that I could barter eternity."

"No such hard bargain shall be required of you, Kate," he said, taking her other hand and lifting both to his lips one after another. "You know me, a moment sufficient for the birth of a resolve, but this resolution has been brought forth slowly and with much thought. I am weary, I say, and would be at rest. I have punished the criminal men that did me wrong. I have amassed wealth enough to make me a prince in that same valley. I have gained a faithful, loving heart"—here he drew her nearer to him, and her head fell upon his breast—"and I would be at peace."

The woman who had been true to her master though false to all else wept on his shoulder. The icy Kate Lucas was melted, and, like Niobe, all tears. He chid her tenderly—her eyes dancing with fiendish mockery over her shoulder the while—and at last, when her sob of delight and joy had ceased, he told her his wishes.

"You will start to-night, Kate, and go on to Calais. Wait there till I can join you. I may be a week. I may be a fortnight. If I am so long as the latter I would have you go on to Lausanne. I have a house there all ready to receive a prince. You shall travel as Mrs. Clifford, you shall arrive there as its mistress—and my wife!"

She caught his hand feverishly.

"Your wife?" she said.

"Ay," he said, drooping his eyelids, "my wife. I will write on to the housekeeper to have all ready for you, but wait for me for the fortnight at Calais. And now to-night you start. You are mistress at the Hall and can make any excuse for your sudden journey. And, Kate"—he lowered his voice to a dulcet whisper—"do not go empty handed. Remember the Israelites, and when you leave your Egypt forget not the ornaments. Spoil my lady's jewel casket, Kate, and spare it not. You have the key I'll be sworn."

She smiled and flushed.

"I thought so," he said, stroking his moustache. "Rife it well, the Melville diamonds will shine right royally on Madame Clifford's brow, the emeralds will sparkle, and the rubies will glitter right merrily on her bosom. Oh, empty the jewel-case, by all means, sweet Kate."

He was caressing her hand the while he spoke, and the woman in a delirious, dream-like state listened eagerly.

"Come," he said, "you have to pack. The Rivershall carriage can take you to the first stage; I will sit here until I hear its wheels go by, and I shall know you are gone where I shall soon follow."

He rose as he spoke, and she rose too from the chair into which she had dropped.

"And you," she said, lifting her eyes to his, "what will you be doing while I am on the road?"

"Winding up affairs in miserable England for the last time, sweet Kate, for the last time."

"You will be in no danger?" she said, anxiously.

"Trust me," he said, with a sharp, hard laugh quite new to him. "I will be as good as a Quaker, Kate, and keep as free of danger as a thistle does of grapes. And now go, lass, dear, and let me hear the wheels in an hour."

He drew her to him again, and pressed a kiss upon her forehead.

She snatched one from him, cowered afterwards as if she expected a blow for her presumption, and glided from the room.

He stood looking at the door through which she had gone for a full minute, then with a sigh dropped into the chair again.

"Poor Kate!" he muttered. "She is the only woman who ever really loved me. What should I have done without her grand tact and courage? Poor Kate! Poor Kate!"

Then with a harsh laugh he seized the bottle, but before he had poured the wine out he had gone off on another train of thought, and he sat drooping before the fire without lifting the glass or moving hand or foot, until the rattle of carriage wheels went past the house; then he started up, caught up a candle, and muttering "Poor Kate! poor Kate!" ascended the stairs to his bed-chamber.

In half an hour he came down into the little bar with a face looking ten years younger, without wrinkles or hollows, with a bright bloom upon the full cheek and a light-hearted smile upon the lips.

He called for another bottle of wine, and passed it to the man, with a gracious wave of the hand.

"Drink, my man," he said, "drink; it's long since I've seen an English face. I have just come from over the sea. Come, another bottle, my good woman. And now can any of you tell me the way to the Hall?"

CHAPTER II.

Though man can cover crimes with bold, stern looks,
Poor women's faces are their own faults' books.

Shakespeare.

As solitary as the man Melchior in the ale-house parlour sat Leonora, Lady Melville, in the luxuriously drawn drawing-room. Dinner had been served in the small dining-room, and her ladyship had dined with the wing of a chicken, and been seen to eat a few grapes.

She was back now in the drawing-room, with its wax candles and silver candlesticks, its costly hangings and bulb furniture. But from all the beauty and luxury of the apartment my lady had no eyes, her dark, sombre, brooding ones were fixed, like the man in the alehouse, upon the fire.

Miss Lucas, entering after her interview with the man Melchior, found her thus, and startled her into a semblance of life for the moment by telling her that she was summoned abroad by the illness of a relative.

"I thought you had no relatives?" said Lady Melville, raising her eyes for a moment, then returning to the fire before the answer.

"I thought not likewise, my lady," was the answer. "But it seems that I have, and that they need me. Have I your ladyship's permission to take a holiday?"

Her ladyship shifted uneasily in her chair, and her eyes flashed up again.

"Why do you go through the mockery of asking?" she said, hastily; "who is mistress here, are not you?"

Miss Lucas beyond a smile made no reply.

"When do you go?" asked Lady Melville.

"To-night, within an hour. My relative is at death's door."

"What relative is it?" asked her ladyship.

"My aunt," said Miss Lucas, with a dry cough. "You may go, if you are waiting for my permission, as soon as you please."

Miss Lucas still waited.

Lady Melville, who thought she had left the room—it was generally impossible to tell by the sense of hearing whether Miss Lucas was in the room, so sneakily did she move about—started when looking up she saw that she still stood there.

"What do you want—money?"

"It is the first time I have ever asked," said Miss Lucas.

Lady Melville rose wearily and walked to her writing-table.

"How much do you wish?" she said.

"Your ladyship can make it for five thousand pounds."

Wearily and indifferently she drew up the cheque, signed it and handed it.

The two hands met in the transference of the piece of paper and at the contact her ladyship shuddered.

"Are you coming back?" she asked, as Miss Lucas

folded the piece of paper and placed it in her bosom carefully.

Miss Lucas hesitated a moment.

"Your ladyship shall hear from me," she said, and, with a smile cold and full of significant disdain for the weaker clay, the woman of iron left the room.

She had gone half an hour and then the weak woman began to wish her back.

She looked round the room fearfully and shivered as with cold.

"Alone, all alone!" she murmured, drawing nearer to the fire. "Better to have her to watch and guard than no one. Why did I let her go? Why did I let her go?"

She fell to rocking herself to and fro and rubbing her thin hands one over the other, muttering at intervals that one wail:

"Alone, alone!"

A physician skilled in the signs of incipient insanity, seeing my lady just then, would have shaken his head gravely.

Presently there was a ring at the front door, but my lady, who usually started aghast at such summons, took no notice of this, and, when a servant opened the door and admitted a gentleman, she still seemed unconscious of everything save her miserable solitude, and it was not until the stranger had stood in the centre of the room looking at her for some minutes with a sombre, pensive air that she raised her head.

Whom she did so he came forward, dropping his cloak, and with a smile held out his hand.

"Leonora?"

She rose, fixed her eyes upon the bronzed face, and dropped into the chair again.

He started and looked at her attentively. The colour forsook his face and left it for a moment livid.

"Great Heaven!" he murmured, hoarsely. "She's going mad!"

He wiped the perspiration from his brow covertly, then going up to her touched her on the arm gently.

At that she sprang up.

"Who is it?" she asked, trembling. "I thought I was dreaming. Who is it?"

"It is I, Leonora; do you not know me?" he said, softly, bending over her and gazing into the thin, wasted face. "I, Melchior Clifford, your old lover!"

She looked at him, breathing slowly, her eyes distending, her colour coming and going with each pulsation.

"You!" she said, hoarsely. "You come back from the dead!"

"No, Leonora, not from the dead; I am alive and well—give me your hand."

He put out his hand and she spoke, but she struck it away wildly.

"If you are Melchior Clifford—and no ghost—give me back my boy, my child—my child!"

"Poor Leonora!" he murmured. "And you believe it all! Alas, think you if it had been I that had stolen him that I should not have cherished him for your sake?"

She stared at him for a moment, her lips forming the words over and over again:

"My child, my child!"

He took her hand.

"Leonora," he said, solemnly, "the child died! It was not I that stole him. A man your husband had injured robbed you of your child. I was in France, have been in France ever since."

"It's false!" she retorted, "I heard your voice in my shrubbery a few days ago!"

He started and turned pale.

"So be it," he muttered, savagely. "I must change the tactics."

Drawing himself to his full height, he seized her arm roughly and brought his face close to hers.

"And, if you did, what then, woman? Look me in the face, the man you played false to, the man whose life you ruined. Look me in the face and tell me what you see there. Is it a face you can conquer or will it conquer you? Tell me, weak idiot! I am here to-night to pay back old scores in a new way. Collect your sense, Leonora, Lady Melville, for I, your old lover, am here to woo again; this time to wed!"

She still stood like a thing of stone, looking at him with wild, distasteful eyes.

"Sit down," he said, "and listen. Drink this," and he took a small bottle of cordial from a side-table and forced it to her lips. "Collect yourself. You used to be a sensible woman. Look at me. You remember me? I am Melchior Clifford, and I have come back to marry you."

"To marry me!" she breathed, with a shudder.

"Ay," he said, with a short laugh. "And to save you, to save you!"

"To save me?" she repeated.

"Ay," he said again. "Do you ask what from? I reply the gallows!"

She shuddered from head to foot, and shrank from

the scoffing interrogator as if he had been the loathed thing itself.

He smiled.

"Come," he said, "that is right; forget the past, and look forward to the future. You must have expected this; you knew better than to suppose I should leave you for ever. You knew that I should come and claim my right, my reward!"

"Reward," she repeated, brushing her hair from her forehead with a mechanical gesture, as if she wanted more light, "reward!"

"Ay," he said, "reward for all these years' work. Who works for nothing? not you, Leonora, Lady Melville, nor I. I have worked to place you where you are—here, snug in Rivershall—and I have come to claim my right to share it with you."

She rose and clasped her forehead with both hands. Then, throwing them up above her head, she cried, with eyes upturned:

"Merciful Heaven! how blind, how blind! I see it all now that it is too late. You are the fiend that has prompted all this work. You are the—the Chevalier de Morni!"

"I am," he said, holding the hands at his back to the blaze, and smiling at her with the old masterful smile.

"You are the cursed doctor who murdered—poisoned Sir Ralph and Lillian Melville?"

"I am," he said, "but an accomplice and servant of yours, my lady. You may remember, perhaps, bestowing a pretty little casket with a pretty little enclosure on a certain governess—"

"Oh, Heaven! You, too, were in league with that she-fiend, and between you have worked my ruin in this world and the next!"

"A very comfortable ruin," he said, waving his white hand round the luxurious room with a smile.

"That other villain too," she continued, running over the past and its complications, and trying to unravel the skein which she herself had helped to entangle. "You, too, helped him perhaps to tyrannize over and tantalize me."

"Lord Harcourt, you mean," he said, and a dark frown knit his brow. "No, Leonora, he is as much my enemy as yours; my lord and I have a little matter to settle, but all in good time. No, Lady Melville, there is no sympathy between my Lord Bully and me. Call me what you will—the fiend if you like—but you cannot say I ever treated a woman like a cur. Come, sit down and be calm; what good can you find in going over the past, and trying to connect me with every link in it? It is enough that I am here, that I am at your feet as of old, to woo and to win."

She let him take her hand, seeming unconscious that she did so, and he led her to the couch, where she sat staring at the fire and plucking the raps of her dress with her thin, nervous hands.

He watched her closely in silence. Suddenly she looked up and round like a fugitive surrounded on all sides, and then, fixing her eyes upon his face, said, piteously:

"Is there no escape?"

"From me? None. What would you escape from? Look at me. I am not old, I am not wrinkled nor decrepit—not like the man you played me false for, Leonora—and I am rich. Marry me, redeem the pledge of your sweet girlhood, and you have a good husband and a powerful guardian. Refuse, and—well, what better hands do you fall into? Lord Harcourt would be back directly to bully you into your grave, Kate Lucas will return to domineer over you, and, lastly, some prying official will get upon the scent of that deeper and darker mystery, and—"

"Enough," she breathed, putting up both hands to shut the words out. "I was mad, mad with jealousy and rage; tortured out of my senses by that dreadful woman—your tool. I swear before Heaven that I meant them no harm, that I regretted with the bitterest remorse the work of that moment. Oh, Merciful Powers! what remorse I have endured since. I have seen them night after night standing in their grave clothes at my bed. I meet them on the stairs of this great, gaunt house. They give at me from their frames in the gallery, and they sit by my side at meals and flavour each morsel I eat. Oh, Heaven! that I were dead! that I were dead!"

Had the creature at her side had anything farther than the mere form of a man, he would have had mercy, had taken the fearful load off his victim's heart, but he said nothing, and smiled.

"Leonora," he said, presently, "it is the weak guilty who suffer; drop the past, forget it. What is done is done, and cannot be undone. Long years are before you. You are young yet—"

"Young!" she retorted, with bitter scorn. "Look at my face! Yours tells nothing of the crimes you have committed. Mine is seared and stricken with my one. Oh, man, man, by the love you once bore me leave me to my fate!"

"Ah!" he said, "that's the word. It is 'fate,' Leonora. It was your fate that you should marry

me; you fought against it, have fought against it all these years, and see to what effect! Fate has enmeshed you in your own toils, and, unalterable as death, still decrees that you should be mine. Marry me you must; afterwards, if it please you, we will leave this grand but gloomy place; we will go to France, Italy, where you will, and in other climes forget the past and build up for ourselves another future."

She shook her head with grave solemnity.

"Forget!" she said, "Never. I have but one hope, and that is death."

"No, no," he said, with a smile. "That is child's play. Let me give you some more cordial. Don't say no. Now you look better. Can you smile? If so do so, for I am going to ring the bell. Will you order a brougham to take me to the inn? Tomorrow I shall away to town to get a special licence, two days hence, Leonora, you will be the wife of Melchior Clifford, who has waited all these years for you."

She had sunk into her old attitude now, but when he rang the bell she looked up and with his eyes fixed on hers ordered the brougham as he had directed.

It was a point gained and he would not spoil it by stopping longer.

"Good night, my bride to be," he said, stopping and taking her hand. "Good night. Two days hence and we will set the bells going to a happier metre than they have been used to lately."

She looked at him as if she only half comprehended his meaning and with her hand in his started suddenly.

"I want Kate Lucas," she said, passing her hand over her forehead.

"Kate Lucas you will never see again," he said. "She is gone with all your other troubles," and he waved his white hand.

"Never again," she said, looking troubled and bewildered. "Never again."

"Never!" he said.

"Why? How?" she said. "She will come back."

"No," he said.

Then, seeing that she had lost the thread and was groping for it helplessly in her confusion, he helped her.

"She was in my power, Leonora. Poor girl! she deserved a better fate! Now she is in yours."

"In mine?" she repeated, monotonously.

"Ay," he said. "Go upstairs and look at your jewel case. If a single stone or trinket remain Kate is not half so sensible a girl as I thought."

"My jewels!" she repeated. "Stolen them?"

"Ay," he said, "stolen them, every one of them. She will not dare to come back, to set her foot in England, for you will be on the alert to arrest her, and she knows it. Poor girl! it was a shame to take her in her own trap with her own bait, but I have never spared man nor woman that stood in my path to you, Leonora; and now that she, the last of the straws, is swept away I do but wait the crowning of my endeavours. Good night, sweet Leonora; how the old days come back to me at the name! Good night. Two days hence and you are my wife and under my protection."

He kissed her cold hand again, and then, as the servant threw open the door to announce that the brougham was ready, bowed with the air of a courier and swept out.

The brougham was at the entrance and two servants stood ready to help the visitor in and close the door after him.

They thought him nothing less than a prince, and by some strange instinct already saw in him their future master.

"Where shall I say, sir?" asked one of them.

"To the inn," he said, falling back into the satin cushions. "And quickly, please."

The coachman tightened his reins and was about to start when a man, a farm labourer by his dress, walked across the road with a true yokel lurch and stopped the horses.

The coachman swore at him, but the fellow, who seemed either half-seas-over or stupid, lurched round, and actually came between the two footmen and the carriage door.

The light from the entrance hall streamed full upon the face of the important visitor, and no doubt the yokel saw it, and acknowledged its dignity, for he tugged at his cap, and, stroking a pair of thick, heavy whiskers, snarled out a countrified

"Good night, measter."

"Good night, my fine fellow," said the gentleman, good-humouredly, adding to the obsequious footmen as the carriage now started, "Going home drunk and happy."

But the yokel did not behave much like a drunken man—or perhaps it might be considered that he did; for directly he had got into the darkness he turned out of the side walk and ran along by the hedge in the direction which the brougham had taken, and by

cutting across a field he reached the inn in time to see—while he himself was hidden from view by a deep shadow behind the porch—the gentleman from the Hall alight and enter the inn.

Soon after the yokel entered the bar himself, and in true country fashion got into conversation with the little group of labourers there, and learned that the strange gentleman was also a liberal one; that he had stood two bottles of wine, and that he had two private rooms set apart for his use—to wit, the best parlour and the best bedroom.

Having in a casual way ascertained the position of these two rooms, the yokel, who was a stranger to these parts himself, paid his reckoning and tramped out.

In the morning my lord, his highness, the prince, or whatever else he was, paid his bill, gave the good woman of the house a sovereign into the bargain, and asked for the best horse.

He was going to London, he said, but should return after a stay of a few hours only.

A good horse was obtained for him—not the best in the village, however, for that seemed to have been engaged by a bagman who was going up to town also.

The prince, marquis, or whatever else he might be, started at eight o'clock, and set off at a good pace Londonwards.

At a quarter past eight the bagman, a young fellow with an abundant crop of red hair and mutton-chop whiskers, with the additional advantage of a green shade over one eye, started also, likewise on the London road.

At the first inn, five miles on the highway, the gentleman halted for his horse to drink, and five minutes after he had started the bagman arrived and halted likewise.

And, strange to relate, at whatever inn, wayside brook or cross-road the gentleman paused or rested at the bagman followed suit also, five or ten minutes behind, like a shadow.

In this way substance and shadow rode into London city. In this way the shadow found himself—without the scanty whiskers, but with a good crop, sailor fashion, and wrapped in a thick pea-jacket—putting up at the same hotel, and dining in a room whose door overlooked the door of that in which the gentleman was also dining. Indeed, he slept in a room exactly opposite the one in which the gentleman reclined his princely limbs, and seemed as unobtrusive a shadow as any prince, duke, marquis, or lord could possibly desire.

CHAPTER LI.

Thanks, to men
Of noble minds, is honourable need.

Shakespeare.

LEAVING Sir Ralph and Lillian to seek the rest they so much needed, Clarence retired to his own room, to rest if his happiness would allow him, to think if it would not.

He did sleep a little, waking at intervals to touch the wall which separated him from the beautiful girl he loved and to murmur short snatches of thanksgiving and fervent blessings upon her.

He rose early in the morning and fearful of awakening them trod on tip-toe past their doors and paced the street.

He considered them under his protection now—blessed change!—and he was puzzling his brains to evolve some scheme for their restoration to Rivershall and the punishment of the villainy that had so ill-used them.

When he returned Lillian opened the sitting-room door, and with a blushing smile beckoned him.

With an answering smile he sprang forward and caught her hand to his lips.

Her eyes were sparkling with the eagerness of love and gratitude, and as she whispered "Come in" she touched his hand with a light pressure.

Clarence entered and Sir Ralph rose from the arm-chair.

His face had altered in the night also, and liberty had lifted the shadow from a countenance that was now firm and resolute again.

He held out his hand and clasped Clarence's with a grateful emphasis, and with an eager look he said:

"Well, Mr. Clifford, have you hit upon a solution?"

"First let us give Mr. Clifford some breakfast," interposed Lillian, with a faint blush, and Sir Ralph, smiling apologetically, said:

"Forgive me, I feel so well this morning that I am impatient to unravel this mystery. Breakfast by all means, but before even that my thanks."

And he looked gratefully at Clarence, who said, earnestly:

"No thanks yet, Sir Ralph, until I am sure that I am not in some way the cause of your suffering."

Sir Ralph looked gravely astonished.

"You!" he said. "How? But there, let us have some breakfast."

Clarence rose, but Lilian, looking hurt, appealed to her father with a glance, and Sir Ralph said, with some emotion:

"We are your guests, Mr. Clifford, not you ours."

Clarence bowed silently and with secret joy watched Lilian pour out the coffee, rejoicing in her beauty, her bright eyes, and, more than all, the reflection which they gave rise to—that he who loved her had restored her to life.

Perhaps Sir Ralph saw what was passing in his mind, for he looked keenly at him and then sought the fire and sighed.

Breakfast over Sir Ralph set down his cup and looked anxious again.

Lilian took a chair beside her father and Clarence, leaning one arm upon the table, knitted his brows, as was his fashion, and prepared to go over the whole train of circumstances and trace them to their cause.

First Sir Ralph insisted upon telling the story of Doctor Bromwell's appearance and his own and Lilian's illness, then all that followed—indeed repeating Lilian's story almost word for word.

Clarence listened, noting down each important point and following it to its sequence; then at Sir Ralph's request he related his own adventures.

Sir Ralph stared with astonishment.

"But—but," he said, at last, "why persecute you? I can understand their motive for putting me and Lilian away, of course it was to secure Rivershall but you? In what way are you connected with the plot? You had no estate to be plotted away."

"I am struggling to the light, but as yet I can see a faint glimmer only. One thing is certain that to the scoundrel to whom you owe your suffering I also may trace my supposed fortune and imprisonment. One thing more is also certain that the woman, Kate Lucas, was his tool. Lil—Miss Melville's witness of the strange conference in the shrubbery was something more than a suspicion. That man in the moonlight was the contriver of this diabolical plot, and he was Doctor Bromwell."

"But," said Sir Ralph, passing his hand across his forehead, "supposing you are right, where is the man's motive? Who is he?"

There was a pause. Sir Ralph's eyes were fixed upon Clarence's, Lilian's were bent upon the ground.

"That I might also conjecture," said Clarence, slowly, "but I will not. If he be whom I suspect then this tangle will want further unravelling. If it be he, we have to fight against as dark and diabolical a villain as earth holds."

His face darkened and his hand clenched fiercely. Sir Ralph sighed confusedly, then he murmured:

"The motive can be found only in one person's grasp, and that is Lady Melville," and his eyes flashed. Clarence's face paled.

"She," Sir Ralph continued, "is the person who no doubt holds Rivershall. A scheming, wicked woman, whom I will punish if the law has not lost all its power! A wicked, vile woman!"

"Who saved my life?" thought Clarence, with a deep sigh, which caused Lilian to turn her grand, sympathetic eyes upon him.

"And now what course are we to pursue?" asked Sir Ralph, sternly, but looking very reluctantly upon the grave young face of his whilom tutor.

"Have you formed any plan?" Clarence asked.

"N—o," said Sir Ralph. "I—well, let me confess that I have relied on you. Such is gratitude, Mr. Clifford; it looks for favours to come. I am so overwhelmed by the service you have done me that I place myself in your hands, sensible of your courage, your magnanimous forgiveness, and your honour."

Clarence inclined his head, much moved at the speech, which, though characteristically grandiloquent, meant more than it expressed.

"I am grateful, sir," he said, "and I will do my best to work this matter out. My life is at your service, and—Miss Melville's."

Lilian, with tears in her eyes, turned a look of such loving gratitude upon him that he was fain to stroke his moustache and turn his eyes aside, lest they should become so eloquent as to annoy Sir Ralph, who was fully realizing would never consent to marry his daughter to a nameless adventurer, though that adventurer had probably saved her life.

"What I propose is this," he said, after a pause, "that you and Miss Melville should under some assumed name take up your abode in some quiet hotel, while I play the spy and turn the tables upon those who have worked this villainy. But if you prefer it I will go off this instant and lay the matter before the police and leave it in their hands."

"No, no, anything but the latter course. Could I endure to have the Melville name—her name," and he glanced at Lilian, "dragged through the columns of the newspapers for every sweep to roll trippingly off his tongue? No, no, redress must be obtained without publicity—at least until we are back at the Hall,

and can face it from that vantage ground. The police! Great Heaven! to think that the old name should come in contact with them!"

"Well," said Clarence, sorry that he had mentioned them, "then we must take the first course You to your hotel, I to my spying."

"But," said Sir Ralph, looking round the room, "why should we go to an hotel? This is very comfortable, and we are out of the world here, eh, Lilian?"

"I thought," said Clarence, simply, "that this would have been too mean a place for you. At an hotel you would get more comfort and luxury. This—"

"You lived here," said Lilian, looking at him eloquently, "it was not too poor for you—"

"I," he said, with a smile, "I am—"

"A hero," said Sir Ralph, warming up for the moment, much to Lilian's delight; "the more I think of the way you have been treated and all that you have done I am filled with astonishment at your nobleness. Sir, you must have true blood in your veins, and a good heart to act so."

Clarence rose with a suppressed sigh and a glance at Lilian, that said plainly: "You give me credit for too much disinterestedness. If you would seek my motive turn and find it—there!"

But Sir Ralph either did not or would not see, and Clarence, taking up his hat, said:

"Then it is settled that you remain here. I will go and tell the woman of the house, and commence my work; then, adding that he should return shortly, he left the room.

After arranging with the landlady and giving her some commands to insure Sir Ralph's comfort, he went out, and Lilian watched him walk quickly down the street, his brow knitted and heavy with thought.

(To be continued.)

THE ROSE'S JOURNAL.

MORNING.

Oh, beautiful summer-day morning.
Oh, sunshine that brightens my birth!

The nightingale whispered me truly

That fair were the bowers of Earth.

Oh, scented air, tell of my gladness,

Bear hither my joy-laden sigh;

The happiest rose in the garden,

The gladdest of blossoms am I!

TWILIGHT.

Oh, nightingale, friend, do you miss me?

I lie on a maidenly breast,

I rock with a breath-quicken'd billow

Mutely happy, at home, and at rest.

I hear the low tones of a lover,

He asks—will she give me away?

Will he prize and tenderly keep me,

Oh, nightingale, tell me, I pray?

MIDNIGHT.

Oh, nightingale, sing very softly,

Oh, summer night, send me your dew,

I lie on the earth broken-hearted,

Is anything steadfastly true?

The sun—was it shining this morning,

The rose, gay and glad—was it I?

Sing softer, and slower, to soothe me,

Life's sorrowful summer—“Good-bye.”

E. L.

SCIENCE.

M. CHEVALIER mentions a practice of some manufacturers of weighting their silks with a solution of lead acetate, by which means poisonous properties are imparted to the silks, as well as an increase in weight.

SURVEYS have been made by the "Tuscarora" of the bed of the Pacific Ocean over 1,000 miles from Cape Flattery. A submarine mountain has been discovered, 2,400 ft. in height, to which the grade of the eastern slope is 120 ft. to the linear mile. The greatest depth detected was 15,240 ft.; the bottom of the Pacific Ocean being a blue, black, and brown mud, with ooze and occasional mixture of gravel and shale.

ACTION OF THE VAGUS ON THE HEART.—It has sometimes been maintained that the action of the vagus on the heart is due to the fibres of the nerve receive from the spinal accessory. In a recent memoir published by G. Giannuzzi this observer states that even when the spinal accessory nerve has been extirpated, and microscopic examination shows that its fibres running with the vagus have undergone degeneration, excitation of the peripheral stump of the divided vagus exerts an influence on the action of the heart. He finds also that excitation of the sympathetic increases the number of the cardiac beats, and thus whether they have become less frequent or even have ceased altogether. Ordinarily excitation of the vagus in the neck inhibits the action of the heart. Sometimes, however, if the excitation of the

vagus be very slight, the number of the beats is increased. If the heart is quiet, or its contractions are very feeble, as in animals poisoned with ether and strychnia, irritation of the vagus causes commencement or augmentation of the cardiac beats.

MUSEUM AND LIBRARY AT MASSA MARRITIMA.—The little town of Massa Marittima (Tuscany) sets an example which would be well to be followed by many larger and better-known towns both in Italy and this country. In 1867 the municipality of Massa purchased the interesting collection of minerals, models of mining machinery, and specimens of tools used in mines from various countries from Signor Theodore Haupt, a well-known mining engineer of Florence, together with a complete series of maps and plans of most of the mines in Tuscany. This forms the nucleus of the museum, which has since been enriched by a collection of the birds and animals found in the province, the donation of the medical man residing in the town, and their value is considerably enhanced by being well arranged and tabled with both common and scientific names. The library now contains about 6,000 volumes, some of which are of great value, as being extremely rare, and relating to the history of the republic of which Massa was once the capital. The archaeological department contains one very beautiful Etruscan funeral urn.

IRON MANUFACTURE IN THE COLONIES.—A communication received from Sydney should make masters and men in the iron trade pause before allowing the wages question to interfere with the results of their united labour. We are told, upon what appears to be reliable authority, that within the last few months discoveries have been made in New South Wales which will shortly enable that colony to supply iron of superior quality cheaper than any other country. At the present time the ironworks of New South Wales and Victoria only work up scrap iron, on account of the fact that the necessary materials for the manufacture of iron have not been found within easy distance of one another. Now, however, such discoveries have been made that the chief necessity for a large production of iron at a small cost is that of a few ironmasters with a knowledge of the value and mode of development of such property as is easily obtainable. Capital is abundant in the colonies; it is knowledge of the trade that is required. It is stated that so favourably situated as regards minerals are some parts of New South Wales that coal, ironstone, or limestone, can be put into the furnace for five shillings per ton, and our informant calculates that pig iron could be made in this colony and delivered in Wolverhampton at a cost not exceeding four pounds per ton, or a little more than half the present price of pig iron. The materials for the production of iron extend over thousands of acres of these colonies. One piece of land, of about 2,000 acres, contains these materials within four miles: that is to say, in one line there are two and a half miles between the coal and the limestone, and a mile and a half between the limestone and the ironstone. This is the case near Wallarawang, three miles and a half from a railway station, and 105 miles from Sydney.

PLANTS IN SLEEPING ROOMS.—In a recent number of a contemporary, a medical periodical, is a letter from Mr. Kedzie, in which he quotes a paragraph from Professor Johnson's "How Crops Feed," in which it is stated very correctly that the quantity of carbonic acid absorbed by day by plants in direct light is vastly greater than that exhaled during the night. According to Corenwinder's experiments, fifteen to twenty minutes of direct sunlight enable the colza, the pea, the bean, the raspberry, and sunflower to absorb as much carbonic acid as they exhale during a whole night. Boussingault found as the average of a number of experiments that a square metre of oleander leaves decomposed in sunlight 1:108 litres of carbonic acid per hour; in the dark the same surface of leaf exhaled .07 litre (each litre is equal to about two pints and one-eighth) of this gas. From this it would appear that the balance is likely to be in favour of their utility in purifying the air, especially as during the day they eliminate oxygen. In order, however, to determine this point Mr. Kedzie collected air from the college greenhouse, in which there were more than 6,000 plants, before sunrise, and after the room had been closed more than twelve hours. The average of five analyses showed that there were 3:9 parts of carbonic acid in 10,000 of air, and it thus appears that the air in the greenhouse was better than "pure country air," which contains 4 parts in 10,000. To ascertain whether the air of the greenhouse had more carbonic acid by night than by day Mr. Kedzie analyzed two specimens at 2 p.m. These gave 1:49 and 1:38 parts of carbonic acid in 10,000, or an average of 1:39 parts, showing that the night air contained more carbonic acid than did the air of the day. On the whole, it may be safely concluded that the presence of one or two dozen plants in a room will not exhale enough carbonic acid by night to injure the sleepers.



THE FORESTER'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER XXIII.

I will lay
A plot shall show us all a merry day.

Shakespeare.

As has been related, the horses of the count and Manfredi were not many paces from the fountain lawn: and the two men were soon in the saddle again, the count saying aloud as he leaped gaily to his seat:

"The father of Sicardo the Brigand will soon be in prison now, Manfredi."

"Ay, my lord, old Cosmo is doomed. The death of Borrelli will be fixed upon him!" replied Manfredi, as he more slowly than his master attained his saddle seat. "But, my lord, what disposal will be made of Signora Castelletta, the mother of the brigand?"

"What care I what may become of her?" said the count, scornfully. "Take care, on thy peril, man, not to reveal, without my consent, that Cosmo and his wife are the Duke and Duchess del Arnato!"

"My lips are sealed as to that, and as to all that may appertain to thy affairs, my lord," replied Manfredi, humbly. "But, my lord, thou dost not intend that Signorina Vittoria, the sister of Sicardo the Brigand, shall remain at liberty to use her beauty and supplications to effect the release of Cosmo?"

Eager to penetrate more deeply the schemes of his master, Manfredi carelessly asked the above question as he tarried a moment to adjust his bridle.

"Silence, fellow! I will tell thee all thou art to do and to know as we ride hence," said the count, "or I may as well tell thee now that which thou hast to do at present. We will leave Borrelli's horse tied here."

"Yes, my lord."

"Then thou wilt ride with me, say a mile."

"Yes, my lord."

"Then will I leave thee and ride on to the grove of the Gray Rocks, where our party is. When I shall have been gone from thee long enough to have joined our men do thou ride after me at full speed. Come charging at headlong speed among us, shouting 'Cosmo hath slain Borrelli!' Then tell this tale in substance:

"Count Alfrasco did send Borrelli to fetch a horn of water from the fountain of San Antonio, which is less than two miles from the main road. My lord and I awaited Borrelli's return. He remained long away, and my lord sent me after Borrelli to hasten his return. I rode into the forest, and not far from

THE WARNING.

the fountain I found Borrelli's horse tied to a tree. I then fastened my horse and walked to the fountain. Ere I came into view of any one that might be there I beheld a man stealing through the thicket away from the fountain. I was near enough to recognize the man. The man was Cosmo the Forester. As soon as he was well away I hurried to the fountain. There I found our late comrade dead—stabbed in the back with a staff, on the shaft of which is carved the name of Cosmo. Terrified by the sight, I fled to where I had left my horse. I mounted him and spurred through the forest to where I had left Count Alfrasco. He was gone and I came on."

"This tale thou wilt tell, Manfredi, with much seeming terror, incoherence and agitation. My words will corroborate thine. We will all hurry back to the fountain. The cross-bow bolt will be found; then the handkerchief, and in it my golden drinking-horn, from which I drank in the presence of all my attendants this morning. We will then arrest Cosmo and carry him to Atrani. He will be cast into a dungeon, there to remain until he shall be tried, convicted and sentenced. This is all that it is necessary for thee to know at present. Come, let us be gone."

The count then departed toward the high road, closely followed by Manfredi.

When both were out of sight a form came quickly into view near Borrelli's horse. Instantly afterward appeared another form; and these two were Linetta, the wife of Sicardo, and Ahmet, the Moorish page.

Both were in the garb of Bohemian gipsies, nor could any scrutiny, unless very close, have detected that they were not true specimens of that wandering race.

Latent jealousy of Vittoria had prompted Sicardo's wife to visit thus secretly the vicinity of the fountain. To her and to Ahmet the brigand had intrusted the perilous task of affixing the ears of Count Alfrasco to the banner staff in the Largo Del Mercato, while he pursued the Greek marauders who had carried off his infant son from Forza.

Linetta and Ahmet had accomplished the feat, and Linetta had left that threat of vengeance already mentioned, whose effect had been to terrify the queen, and to force the Grand Constable to send the child to Sicily.

Having learned that her child was on the way to Messina, Linetta and Ahmet had evaded the search made for them in Naples, and turned the course of their flight toward Del Parso, as Linetta desired to see Vittoria and question her closely of that interest which Sicardo had so warmly evinced for the daughter of the old forester.

She and Ahmet were on their way to the fountain, and near the three horses, when the return of Manfredi and the count caused them to halt and lie motionless and concealed during the conversation we have just related.

"Oh, my husband, how my unworthy jealousy hath wronged thee!" sighed Linetta, as she arose from her ambush.

"And what a base plot we have overheard!" said Ahmet.

"And Cosmo is the father of my husband! and the fair girl, of whose beauty I was so jealous, is my husband's sister!"

"But that is a secret which my master has not wished us or any one to know," said Ahmet, "and let my tongue fall out if ever I reveal it. But let us to the fountain and see what hath been done there."

"Nay, we know that a foul murder hath been done there upon Borrelli. Let us at once hasten to alarm Cosmo," said Signora Linetta.

"I know not where his dwelling is, my lady; and yet it cannot be far away."

"I know, for my childhood was passed in Del Parso," replied Signora Linetta. "Come, let us hasten to warn the noble old man. Oh, Ahmet, how I love that brave old man now that I know he is the father of my husband! Ay, and my soul is now full of love and pity for the beautiful Vittoria! Come, let us fly!"

With eager and rapid steps they ran through the forest, and were soon in that path which led from the cottage of Cosmo to the fountain.

Meanwhile the hours had been passing wearily and full of trouble in the humble dwelling of Cosmo. Signora Castelletta, though ignorant of the vicinity of the dreaded ruffian Alfrasco, knew well the danger that had menaced herself and husband since her visit weeks before to the fountain. Vittoria's heart had been as heavy as lead from the moment she had taken that oath never again to speak with Lord Colonna.

The mind of Cosmo was oppressed with a load of care. His wife and daughter saw by the gloom on his face and the nervousness of his movements that he was aware of some immediate peril of detection and detention of their intended speedy flight.

They questioned him.

"He replied:

"If peril is near us it may fall upon us. To tell you what I fear cannot guard against the blow. It may not fall. Let us be hopeful."

The three were silently partaking of their noonday meal when a rap at the door at the front of the cottage startled them.

Cosmo placed his fingers on his lips. All remained silent. The doors and shutters of the windows being closed, the interior of the cottage was dark and obscure. The eyes of the family, accustomed now to this gloom, however, could readily discern every object; but any eye peering in at any of the cracks of the dwelling could see only darkness.

The rapping was repeated, and violently.

Still Cosmo held his finger on his lips. It was his hope that whoever was without might be led to believe the dwelling was deserted, and go away.

"Cosmo! Cosmo!" called out a voice outside.

Cosmo and his family exchanged glances of wonder. The voice was that of a woman, clear, sweet, and imploring.

Still the cautious old man, suspicious, and knowing the cunning of the Caraccioli, held his finger on his bearded lips.

"Cosmo, if thou art there," said the voice again, in clear and ringing tones, "I am parilling my own life to warn thee of a great danger—of a base and wily plot to convict thee of a murder. I am thy friend. I am the wife of Sardic."

"The wife of Sardic!" muttered Cosmo, smiling in his beard bitterly. "Tis said he hath a hundred wives, like the Turk."

Then spoke the voice of Ahmet, though none in the cottage had ever heard of him. But the speech of Ahmet was in Moorish, a language of which Vittoria knew not a word; yet one with which Cosmo and his wife were perfectly acquainted.

"My noble lord, Prince and Duke Leonato, we are thy friends. Hear us!"

"Great Heaven! our secret is known!" was the mental ejaculation of both Cosmo and his wife, understanding well the words, but knowing that it was the voice of a stranger and of a Moor.

No Christian tongue, they knew, could so perfectly articulate the language of the infidel.

"Thy enemy, Alfrasco, is not far off," continued Ahmet. "He and many of his followers will be upon thee within two hours at least. Thou art to be arrested for the assassination of Alonzo Borrelli, who lies dead and murdered with thy staff at the fountain of San Antonio. Thy only hope is in immediate flight, for the plot is cunning, and will undoubtedly be proved against thee. Fly with us, the wife and page of Rizzio di Sardic. We are on our way to Rosano, whence we are to escape to Sicily."

"One cannot escape from fate," said Cosmo, in Moorish, to his wife. "I will speak with them. If they be enemies they will not depart without forcing an entrance, for they believe I am here."

So saying the old man arose and opened the door. He beheld two persons in the garb of Bohemian gypsies.

"Fly, Cosmo!" said Signora Linetta.

"Fly, Duke del Arnato," said Ahmet, in his own tongue.

"If I be he whom thou callest Duke del Arnato, my life is forfeited already in Sicily," began Cosmo, gazing keenly at the dark and youthful face of the Moor.

"Fly, my lady!" interrupted Ahmet, at this instant, and pointing to the crest of a hill half a mile away, over which passed the high road to Atrani.

Glimming towards the hill Cosmo and Signora Linetta saw the points of several lances gleaming in the sun.

Those who bore them were riding at full speed, and from a staff carried by one of the riders fluttered the banner of Alfrasco of Zapponetto.

His lieutenant, somewhat alarmed by the long absence of his chief, had returned on his course after having halted for a long time at the place called the Grove of the Gray Rocks. As he and those with him were returning they had met the count, and halted. Soon after this Manfredi had rejoined them, and told the tale his master had commanded him to tell.

The count had despatched half of his force under the guidance of Manfredi to visit the fountain; and placing himself at the head of the others he was now riding at full speed to arrest Cosmo.

"See—he comes!" exclaimed the signora. "Wilt fly with us, noble Cosmo?"

"Fly, husband!"

"Fly, father!"

"And not only desert ye," replied the unhappy man, "but by my flight confess a fear of being arrested for the murder of Borrelli! Never! I am innocent."

"They will prove thee guilty," exclaimed Donna Castellotta, wringing her hands.

"Then will I die innocent," replied Cosmo, calmly.

"Allah be thy aid, noble old man!" exclaimed Ahmet. "But thou art a dead man if thou fallest into the hands of that Caraccioli."

"Ay, that I know, Moor; or into the power of any Caraccioli. Away, and give this message to thy master. If Cosmo the Forester—for so I am here called—fall by the hand or plot of Alfrasco of Zappo-

netto, Sardic the Brigand will die under the curse of Cosmo if Sardic's dagger do not pierce the hearts of the whole Caraccioli race."

"Sardic will avenge thee and thine!" cried Signora Linetta. "Heaven bless and guard thee, Vittoria, my sister!"

And ere her intention could be suspected the wife of Sardic threw her arms around the neck of Vittoria, and, snatching a fervent kiss from the astonished maiden's lips, fled from the cottage, followed by the nimble Ahmet.

At that instant the coming horseman could not see the cottage, as the road they were on crossed a valley and passed through wood.

"They would have served us if they could," said Cosmo, gazing after the disappearing pair.

"His wife and his page! Alas! where and what is he?"

"'Twas a woman in the garb of a man, was it not, father?" asked Vittoria, as the old man sat down, gloomy.

He did not close the door, for he knew it would not serve him now.

"The one whose voice was like music?"

"Yes, father, and who kissed me."

"Ay—she is a woman, and I doubt not Heaven intended her for a noble woman—and yet she is the wife of a brigand."

"And why did she call me sister?"

"She meant that thou wert her sister as all women are sisters to each other. But say no more of that, wife and child, I see that I am to be torn from ya. Thou seest now, Vittoria, what a foe a Caraccioli may be."

"And but for my illness," moaned the wife, interrupting the speech of her husband, and weeping upon his bosom, "thou wouldest now be far beyond the power of all thy enemies!"

"Nay," replied Cosmo, soothingly, "reproach not thy illness, dear wife, for that is to reproach Heaven. Let all who are mortal bow their heads to Heaven's decree, and say, with resigned hearts, 'Thy will be done!'"

An hour later beheld Cosmo on the way to Atrani, his arms bound behind him, his legs tied to the beast on which the count had commanded he should be carried.

The count and others of his troop accompanied the prisoner; a guard of three men were left at the cottage, to see that Cosmo's wife and daughter did not leave the province.

The body of Borrelli, borne on a litter fastened between two horses, was also taken to Atrani, and near it rode Manfredi, his emaciated and corpulent face more hideous and repulsive than that of the dead man whose murderer he was.

Once, on the way to Atrani, Manfredi, in adjusting one of the straps of the litter, chanced to grasp the arm of the dead man, though intending to seize one of the poles of the litter.

With a shudder of horror Manfredi snatched away his hand the instant he perceived what he had grasped. With another shudder that had nearly ended in a convulsion like that he had had at the Castle of Zapponetto he saw a great gush of blood suddenly well forth from the mouth of the corpse.

"Ay! I slew thee!" muttered Manfredi, recoiling from the litter. "I will take care not to touch thee again, lest others might see thy mute accusation and suspect my deed."

After that Manfredi rode far in the rear. The cavalcade arrived at Atrani, the ancient seat of the extinct line of the original Counts Del Parso, as the sun went down.

The town was excited, the bells were ringing and people shouting.

"What means this excitement?" asked the count, who was riding far in advance of his prisoners, of one whom he met near the gate of the old town.

"The queen hath sent a royal herald to Atrani," replied the man questioned; "and he hath proclaimed in the market-place that Lord Colonna di Caraccioli, Prince del Greco and Duke di Vallata, hath received for life, and his heirs after him, the governorship and title that used to belong to our ancient lords of this province. The people are rejoicing because Colonna the Just is now Count del Parso."

"Ah!" thought the count, as a gleam flashed from his eyes. "My brother must have been making fierce love to the old queen since his return to Naples or she would not have had such proclamation made."

"And there is other news, my lord," said the garrulous citizen of Atrani, with a bow, for he knew he was speaking to a Caraccioli.

"What is it, my friend?"

"It is rumoured that after Count Colonna—we give the prince that title now—it is whispered at Naples that after Count Colonna shall have been regularly installed as our perpetual lord he is to wed the queen!"

"Ah, indeed!"

"Ay, my lord, "there is very little known at

Naples that we shroud fellows at Atrani do not know," said the talkative burgher, wagging his head.

"And when comes the new Count del Parso, friend?"

"His lordship is here."

"In Atrani?"

"Ay, my lord. He arrived an hour since and is to repose at the house of the chief magistrate of the town until the old Palace Del Parso can be put in order. The chief magistrate—my sister's husband's fifth cousin's husband, whom!—hath indeed vacated his house, and left all at the disposal of Count Del Parso."

"I would see the chief magistrate," said the count, "as I have a prisoner—the man thou mayst see on the male amid the advancing party—"

"Hah! Is it not the worthy Cosmo I see?" interrupted the burgher, in amazement. "Cosmo the Forester?"

"Cosmo the Murderer!" said the count, sternly.

"Cosmo—the good, the generous—the oh, can it be that he, the admired friend of Father Anselmo—" "Hold thy tongue!" broke in the count, fiercely. "Cosmo di Sardic hath committed a most foul murder. He hath slain in cold blood my body servant, Alonzo Borrelli, and robbed him of a golden drinking-horn—at what art thou scoffing, villain?"

"Nay, my lord, I did not scoff!"

"Thou didst grin in my face!" said the count, sternly.

"I meant no discourtesy, my lord. I did but smile—"

"At what?"

"At the charge with which some evil men—who therelone merit hanging—have led thy greatness to imagine that yon noble old man could be capable of murder and robbery. Why, my lord, he is honoured and beloved and well nigh adored by all the people of Atrani. Nay, my lord, ne'er lift thy riding-staff over me!" said the stout citizen, a man of mark in the town, and superintendent or chief janitor of the town gate. "We of Atrani have a governor now."

"Am I not the brother of thy new governor?" sneered the count, as his riding-staff smote the citizen in the face. "Am I not a Caraccioli?"

"Heaven forbid that our new Count Del Parso be such a Caraccioli," muttered the affrighted citizen, as the fierce Alfrasco rode into the town.

Count Alfrasco soon found the mayor of the town, and, having seen Cosmo shut up in a dungeon, rode away to have an interview with Lord Colonna, the new governor of Del Parso and all its towns and villages—a dignitary of almost sovereign power by right of his authority from the queen—a viceroy in fact.

Lord Colonna received his brother alone, in the private study of the mayor of the town, who had resigned his entire residence to the use and occupancy of the new governor and his large train of attendants.

"Good life!" exclaimed the prince, as he gazed at his half-brother. "The operation of which thou didst tell me ere we parted hath been achieved!"

"As thou seest, Colonna," replied the count, touching his ears, "and I dare wear jewels in them. But why I have ears is a secret."

"So be it, Alfrasco. Fear not that I shall ever tell it."

"And those who saw the combat?"

"Have sworn never to tell that they saw thy ears severed from thy head; and certainly they will not dare say so when they see thee wearing ears of flesh and blood still," replied the prince.

"Ay, these ears will be evidence of their falsehood if they ever say the brigand cut off my ears, and my sword will give their deaths," said the count, scowling. "But thou art thin and pale."

"Ah—we need not speak of that," sighed Lord Colonna.

"No doubt our father hath made thee a victim on the altar of ambition."

"Nay—let us not speak of that, Alfrasco."

"It is whispered already, even here, that thou hast sold thyself to be the queen's husband."

Lord Colonna made no reply to this, but heaved a sigh of despair.

"Is it true, Colonna?"

"I have obeyed my father," at length replied the prince, pale and stern. "I have done so to spare the lives of more than one from misery."

"I do not understand thee, Colonna, though doubtless the queen would be most miserable without thee."

"Lord art here to taunt me!"

"Nay; I am on my way to Naples."

"Then go on; and mark my words, Alfrasco—never dare to set thy foot on the soil of Del Parso again."

"Ha!"

"Thou didst swear to me at the fountain of San Antonio never again to enter this province. I have learned since I saw thee that thou art, and hast ever been, my enemy."

"Nay—"

"Silence! Hear me, for thou canst not again deceive me. Thy chamberlain, Urtino, is dead. He died he sent for me. On his death-bed he revealed to me that thou wert the instigator of those three attempts which were made to slay me in the streets of Naples, and which were at the time attributed to the enemoy of Sicardo the Brigand."

"Urtino spoke falsely!" cried the count.

But his own face condemned him as he spoke.

"And from a stranger, while I was recently in Naples," continued the prince, "I received this note."

He gave the count a small letter, and in it were these words:

"I love thee not, Colonna di Caraccioli, nor any of thy name. Yet I hate thee not, for thou hast much that is noble in thee. So heed my warning. Beware of thy brother, Alfrasco. Thou wert never nearer to thy death than thou wast when his hand was on his dagger hilt with an interrupted intent to slay thee, as thou didst dip water with thy hand from the fountain of San Antonio to sprinkle on the face of Cosmo's daughter. The coming of thy train saved thy life. I hid in the thicket, saw all."

"RIZZO DI SICARDO."

"And thou believest the word of a brigand?" exclaimed the count, scornfully.

"Ay, rather than thine," replied the prince, sternly. "Depart from Del Parso!"

"Thou art jealous of the love our father gives me!"

"Not a whit!"

"Thou fearest that if I remain in Del Parso I may yet win the love of Cosmo's daughter."

"Listen," said the prince, his anger overcoming his prudence. "I have consented to wed the queen—a woman old enough to be my mother's mother. Why? To save my sister from becoming the wife of an aged ruffian she abhors—to be Count Del Parso to protect Cosmo's daughter from thee."

"Thou lovest Vittoria?"

"What is that to thee? I shall protect her. Be gone! I detest thee! Never dare call me brother again! Never dare cross my path, here or elsewhere! I give thee one hour in which to depart from Atrani, and five hours more to be beyond the limits of Del Parso. Begone!"

And, with a gesture of scorn, the angry prince dismissed the count.

The prince had not yet heard of the death of Borrelli, nor of the arrest of Cosmo.

The count, hiding his rage, sought an immediate interview with Manfredi.

"He gives me an hour in Atrani," mused the count, as he left the presence of his brother. "In one hour I can dig a mine beneath his new greatness that shall hurl him, and it, and Cosmo, and Vittoria to perdition. All works well for me!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

There never yet was a fair woman but she made mouths in a glass. *Shakespeare.*

THREE days before the occurrence of the events related in the preceding chapter Gianni di Caraccioli, Grand Constable of Naples, was summoned to a private interview with the Queen of Naples.

The Grand Constable has already been described to the reader. Queen Joanna the Second was a large and coarsely featured woman, over sixty years of age, whose beauty had long faded or disappeared from age and never-restrained appetite. A certain grandness of mien, and grace of gesture, and a pair of dark eyes, still beautiful and full of fire, were all that remained of her former beauty. But, gotten up with art, paint, cosmetics, false hair, and costly robes, the queen was by no means a homely woman. But she believed herself even more charming than she had been in her youth.

"I have sent for thee, noble constable," she said, when they were alone, "to bid thee again renew thy search, so long relinquished, for the Valdalla Crown."

"All search made thirty years ago, thy grace, was in vain."

"True. But, of late, I know not why," said the queen, "I have often thought that the magic golden band may yet be found."

"Thy grace hath well retained thy wondrous beauty without having the Valdalla Crown," said the constable, bowing and smiling.

"Thou put'st no faith in the legend, replied the queen, sighing, and glancing covertly at her image as it was reflected in a Venetian mirror. "The other day I found this ancient volume of MSS. It speaks of the Valdalla Crown."

The constable, smiling, read the following:

"Now, Queen Valdalla, the wife of Irnac, the German king, did come to great grief in her journey through Italy. She did lose that golden band which

an-aged prince or emir of Asia did give her, telling her that she who wore it would more slowly lose her youth and beauty than any others of the daughters of Eve—nay, that the wearing thereof would enable a wife to win and for ever retain the most devoted love of her husband, no matter how old the wife might be, or how young the husband when the crown was worn. It is said, we know not how truly, that soon after Queen Valdalla began to wear this crown her lord, King Irnac, before that time cold and stern toward her, became a most uxorious and devoted husband, to the wonder and admiration of all; nor could the beauty and arts of the fairest woman in the world lead him aside from his love for Queen Valdalla. But after the loss of the golden band the king fell in love with the sister of the queen, and great scandal arose; and in the end Irnac did divorce his wife, and she died of grief. Nor hath the golden band, called the Valdalla Crown, ever been found since."

"Thy majesty, this is the same old fragment thou didst show me years ago, when the wife of thy brother, King Ladislau, did lose the band, after it had been found—found, I believe, a few years after this ancient author wrote—and for hundreds of years thought to be a relic of the early saints of Asia; but declared to be the lost crown of Queen Valdalla by the great scholars of Rome, three hundred years ago. Thy brother's wife was never made as beautiful by having it as thou hast been while not having it."

And here the courtly constable kissed the fat hand of the wrinkled and vain old queen.

"Nay, this style is all at an end between us, now that thy son is soon to be my husband," said the queen.

"I would that I had not been wedded when first we met, or that I were wifeless now, my liege," said the constable.

"Fie! But of this Valdalla Crown—my soul burns to wear it on my brow. I sometimes fear I am a little too—well, not quite young enough to retain the love of Lord Colonna; and yet—well, I adore him, and wish to share with him the crown of Naples. I am angry with Renato of Anjou, and I now hate Alfonso of Sicily. They both long to hear of my death that they may contend for the throne of Naples. Then will much blood be shed ere either can defeat the other. And if I wed Lord Colonna, and die—here the queen shuddered—"before he does, then he can hold the throne in peace."

"True. But think not of dying, for in heart at least thy grace is younger than my son."

"Oh, were I a thousand years old, my heart would still be young!" exclaimed the queen. "But now do thou offer a reward to whomsoever shall find the Valdalla Crown and deliver it in person to me. Offer not only money—for that many may scorn—if for instance some jealous wife were to find it or gain possession of it."

"Ay, my liege," laughed the constable, "a jealous and fading wife would keep it to wear only in the presence of her husband. No money could purchase it from a jealous wife."

"And who can say that thy wife might not find it, constable?"

"Oh, she never loved me. Ours was a match made for policy, and against her will. But it gave thee Lord Colonna."

"True: so say naught against it. Offer a title, an income most liberal, a pardon for all offences the finder may have committed up to the hour the crown is given to me, and the obligation of Joanna of Naples to bestow any favour she may honourably grant that the finder of the Valdalla Crown shall ask at her hands. Let the matter be drawn up in most solemn form, and write the threat of death by torture of any one that shall find and retain the crown. Here is a copy of the Hebrew writing that is engraved on the inside of the band, and a minute description of its peculiarities."

The Hebrew characters were a fragment of the "Song of Solomon," and in English read thus:

"My beloved is mine, and I am his."

"Attend to this at once, constable, for I have a yearning to wear the Valdalla Crown ere I shall wed Lord Colonna; and thou knowest the marriage is to be on the 10th of next month."

"It shall be proclaimed, my liege," said the constable, who laughed in his sleeve at the superstition of the amorous old queen. "It was in the province of Del Parso that the Valdalla crown was last lost, I believe."

"Yes, but it may have been found and now be in Naples. Some peasant woman may have found it and been wearing it for years, ignorant of its magic virtues. I sometimes am tempted to believe the wives of the poor do wear invisible Valdalla crowns, for their husbands are more faithful to them than your lords are to your spouses—bad man!" said the old queen, dismissing the constable with a playful tap of her fan.

The proclamation was made and copies of it sent to every part of the kingdom.

As the reader is aware the Valdalla Crown had been the headband of Vittoria for more than two years.

But neither she, nor either of her parents, had ever heard of the Valdalla Crown.

Some time after the just related conversation of the Grand Constable and the queen, Alfrasco of Zappone was in his turn closeted with the sovereign.

"I know not what important matter thou canst have to lay before me, Count of Zappone," began the queen, when she and the count were alone. "Thou knowest I am not pleased with the wild and daring life thou hast ever lived; and that thy quarrel with Sicardo the Brigand hath not long ago drawn a vile threat from his wife against my life."

"Nay, gracious liege," replied the count, "I had no part in the raid of the Greek pirates."

"Well, speak. Thy noble father pressed me hard to make thee Count del Parso, and I might have done so had not thy half-brother, Lord Colonna, desired me not to give thee power in that province. Why he did not wish thee to be Count del Parso I know not."

"I am here, my liege, to tell thee."

"Ah!"

"He asked not to be Count del Parso until after he had seen Cosmo's daughter."

"Hoh! What! Whose daughter?" exclaimed the queen, her jealousy fired instantly.

"The most wondrously beautiful daughter of Cosmo di Sicardoli, late Temporary Count del Parso, my liege."

"Cosmo di Sicardoli! He is dead—is he not?"

"Nay, my liege."

"I have heard naught of him for years, and I thought he was dead—or I should not have created a Count del Parso. But what of his daughter and Lord Colonna?"

"Lord Colonna would have wedded the daughter of Cosmo five days ago had he not discovered that she was the sister of Sicardo the Brigand."

"It is false!" screamed the enraged queen, springing to her feet and reaching out her hand to grasp a bell cord.

This bell cord communicated with a bell in an ante-chamber which was thronged with the guards of the palace.

"This is false, and thy head shall—"

"Fa! scarce lower than thine!" said the daring count, as he grasped the waist of the queen. "For who is Cosmo but the outlawed and church-banned Leonato di Chiaramonti, at whom didst well know when thou didst give him the grant of Temporary Count del Parso?"

The queen, amazed and startled, sank quickly back into her seat.

"Nor do I speak falsely, my liege, as I can prove to thee if thou wilt but hear me," said the count.

"I will hear thee. But if I prove thy story false, thy neck and the axe of Black Sforza shall be well acquitted ere long," replied the queen.

The count then told of the extraordinary loveliness of Vittoria, to which the queen listened with fierce restrained rage of jealousy, then of his own unsuccessful attempt to win her love and of the dream of Vittoria as she had told it to him, then of his failure to carry her off by violence.

Here the face of the queen became dark and intense in its expression of eagerness to hear more.

The count continued his story and told of the admiration Lord Colonna had instantly conceived for the splendid beauty of Vittoria; and that he had no doubt that she had kissed Lord Colonna as he slept in the grotto.

"Ambitious, shameless woman!" cried the queen, striking the table before her with her hand. "She believes in dreams, doth she? By the mass! I may make her dream true for two minutes. Ho! I have conceived a thought for vengeance. But go on—fear not to tell all the truth; yet remember that a single false word proved against thee shall cost thee thy life."

Suppressed madness of jealousy caused the large frame of the queen to quiver like a leaf in the wind.

"Thou knowest, my liege, that the return of Lord Colonna to Naples was delayed for several weeks after the Grand Constable met him in Del Parso."

"Yes! Serious illness detained him at the villa-palace of his mother."

"Who told thy majesty that?"

"His father—thy father—the Grand Constable."

"My father is a politic and most cunning man, my liege. The Grand Constable for a long time knew not where Lord Colonna was. At length his spies found that Lord Colonna was concealing himself in the palace of his mother."

"Why did Lord Colonna conceal himself?"

"His soul was fired with love for Vittoria, and he wished to avoid a marriage with thy majesty."

The eyes of the queen flashed living flame. She gasped for breath in her speechless rage.

"Continue!" she said, in a hoarse voice, and fanning her red and swollen face furiously.

"Lord Colonna hearing that the Grand Constable had discovered his place of concealment, fled to Atrani alone and in the disguise of a lawyer's clerk."

"To Atrani—in Del Parso!"

"Yes, my liege, to Atrani, that he might be near Vittoria."

The queen fanned herself so violently that one might have imagined she was defending her face and head from the attack of a thousand wasps!

"Already he had given Vittoria a ring as a token of his love, and received from her this veil, which he for long time wore in his bosom."

The count had with him that veil on which Cosmo had set his heel. He gave it to the queen.

The queen grasped it with both hands as a hungry tigress seizes with both paws a raw joint of a newly slain lamb. She saw embroidered on it the name "Vittoria." She set her teeth upon this name and with teeth and hands tore the veil into shreds.

The face of the conspirator count remained grave and impassive before this absurd and childish violence.

"Go on!" said the queen, beating the table with her hands.

Then the count told of what Manfredi and Borrelli had seen at the fountain, of the love passage between Vittoria and Lord Colonna, and how it was ended by the appearance of Cosmo.

"Ha! and after that he returned to Naples and made love to me!" cried the queen.

"Only because he was at that time hopeless of ever again seeing Vittoria, my liege; and at the command of the Grand Constable, and to protect Vittoria from my passion for her—for he falsely supposes I love her—he persuaded thee to make him Count del Parso."

"So—now I see why he stood out so firmly against the desire of the Grand Constable to make thee Count del Parso!" said the queen.

"And to keep the Grand Constable from forcing my half-sister Estelle Colonna, the sister of Lord Colonna, to wed the old Sir Giovanni del Alta, my brother signed the private betrothal with thy grace."

"She shall at once wed Sir Giovanni del Alta."

"She was yesterday privately wedded to her chosen lover, a Sicilian count, and has sailed for Palermo. She did this by the advice of Lord Colonna, and the aid of his agents. But I have not told thee all, my gracious liege."

"Let me hear all—and speedily!"

"On the same day that Lord Colonna arrived in Atrani as Count del Parso, Cosmo assassinated my retainer Alonso Borrelli. Since then Cosmo hath been tried and convicted and condemned to death by the civic authorities of Atrani. The murder was clearly proved upon Cosmo, despite the exertions of the lawyers employed by Lord Colonna to defend him. The trial lasted for several days, but at last Cosmo was condemned to be beheaded. Then Vittoria, to save the life of her father, and at the command of her mother, went to Lord Colonna and was closeted with him alone in his private audience-chamber for more than an hour."

"Ha!" cried the queen, again striking the table in her rage.

"When she came forth she bore in her hand a full pardon for Cosmo."

"Now, by Heaven, if all this is true," cried the queen, "I will have the heads of all three—of Colonna di Caraccioli, Vittoria, and Cosmo!"

"When Cosmo learned that his daughter had held a private interview with Lord Colonna, and thereby obtained his pardon, he exclaimed: 'Thou shameless girl; thou hast bartered thy honour to a Caraccioli to save a life that hath been forfeited for fifteen years! I curse thee! I spurn thee! I loathe thee!' and with blows he drove her from his cottage, to which he had returned after his liberation from prison."

The count paused, for the enraged queen seemed about to have an apoplectic fit, so purple and livid with jealousy and wrath did her massive face become.

"Thou hast not told all!" at length she exclaimed.

"Nay, not all, my liege. Then Vittoria, half crazed by the words and blows of her father, fled to Atrani, and, throwing herself on her knees before Lord Colonna, cried out:

"Prove to my father that I am not the base creature he calls me!"

"Lord Colonna soothed her with soft words and even kissed her cheek before witnesses—"

"The villain!"

"What says thy father?" asked Lord Colonna.

"He declares that I did sell my honour to thee, Lord Colonna, to save his life!" replied Vittoria.

"Blind old man!" exclaimed Lord Colonna. "I will, though I die for the deed, prove to him and to the world, Vittoria, that I know thee to be worthy of all honour!"

"The traitor to my love!" here cried the queen.

"Then went Lord Colonna to Cosmo's cottage," continued the count, "and with him Vittoria. Then said he to the old man:

"I am here to ask thee, Cosmo, to give me thy daughter in honourable marriage—"

Here the queen interrupted the count with a cry of rage like the howl of a half-stifled tigress.

"Tell all! Tell all!" she cried, as the count again paused.

"Said the old man, in a voice full of hate and scorn:

"Take her! She is well worthy of thee. Thou art a Caraccioli, and she is worthy to be the sister of Sciaro the Brigand!"

"Ha! And what then?" demanded the queen.

"Then Vittoria grew as pale as death, screamed, and fell in a swoon," continued the count. "Then said my henchman, Manfredi, who chanced to be present:

"It is true, my lord. Vittoria is the sister of the infamous brigand, Sciaro!"

"And then?" demanded the queen, eagerly.

"Then said Lord Colonna in a sad voice—for know, my liege, he had all along believed that Vittoria was of noble birth—then said he:

"A Caraccioli cannot wed the sister of a brigand, and be honoured. Yet this maiden shall be cared for. Let this scandal go no farther."

"What!" cried the queen. "Did he intend to keep the matter a secret from me?"

"Doubtless, for he is much loved in Del Parso, my liege."

"The traitor! And where is Vittoria?"

"Lord Colonna hath sent her, with an escort, to the remote and secluded palace of his mother. She is there."

"Ha!"

"And to his mother he sent this letter, which came into my hands after his mother, the Princess Colonna di Caraccioli, had read it," said the count, producing a billet, which the queen snatched from him ere he could kneel to present it.

The letter read thus, in the easily recognized hand of Lord Colonna:

"DEAREST MOTHER: Give refuge and protection to this unfortunate maiden, for the sake of thy son. She is as pure as the blue air of Heaven, and as innocent as an angel. Care for her until I come. It is her desire to become a nun, and it is best for her and others that she shall do so."

"I will be with thee ere long."

"Thy fond and devoted son,

"COLONNA."

"Ay—I must believe all now!" exclaimed the queen, swelling with rage. "He means to deceive his doting mother as he would have deceived his doting queen. Where is he?"

"Still at Atrani, and recovering from a fever that for a time prostrated him after his last interview with Cosmo—the fatigue of his instalation as Count Del Parso, which took place on the day he pardoned Cosmo, and his excitement because of his love for Vittoria, having made him quite ill."

"And where is Cosmo?"

"At his cottage, attending on his wife, who is again at the point of death."

"Has it leaked out that Cosmo is Leonato di Chiaramonti?"

"Only I and my henchman, Manfredi, so much as suspect that fact."

"It is well. None can prove that I know Cosmo di Chiaramonti was the outlawed and banned Duke del Arnato when I made him Temporary Count Del Parso," said the queen. "I know the man. He will never betray one who has befriended him. See that neither thou nor Manfredi reveal to any one that Cosmo is Leonato di Chiaramonti. The old man is guiltless in this love affair of his daughter, and I have ever believed him guiltless also of every charge by which he hath suffered. I believe not that he is Sciaro's father."

"Ay, my liege, I do believe him to be a much-wronged man—save in having slain Borrelli."

"Pish! Why should he have stained his noble hands with the blood of a knave like Borrelli? The pardon granted by Lord Colonna must stand good. Take care, Alfrasco of Zapponetto, that thou dost not stir in that matter. I can read much of thy cunning and daring hand in this death of Borrelli. Thou lovest not thy brother, and, failing to win Vittoria for thyself, thou hast, perhaps, sought to destroy her. But I will leave that to thy conscience, for to make a stir in that matter might reveal to his enemies the existence of Leonato del Arnato. He befriended me when all others stood aloof, and so long as I live I will be his protector."

"Speak of this and thy head shall fall. Who can prove that I knew Cosmo was Leonato di Chiaramonti? Not thou, nor Manfredi; and Cosmo will not. Get thee gone to thy castle at Zapponetto, for

"though I must punish the treachery of Lord Colonna by the mass, I hate the very sight of the man whose words have shattered my dearest hopes! I thought he loved me—at least I thought he loved no one else and would learn to love me."

"I will inquire secretly into all that hath taken place between him and Vittoria, and if all or even half of what thou hast told me be true, all Naples shall behold my vengeance in a marriage on the scaffold! But speak to no one of what thou hast said to me on peril of thy life, Alfrasco of Zapponetto. Leave this city. Thy story, if true, hath destroyed thy brother; but by the mass!" added the despairing queen, as she shook her clenched hand in the face of the conspirator count, "it shall not gain for thee that which thou desirest."

"Nay, my liege, I desire naught save to open thy eyes to this duplicity of a man who is not worthy to be thy husband," replied the count, bowing.

"Knafe! Thou dost hope by the ruin of Lord Colonna to be made Prince del Greco, and in the end heir of thy father Sir Gianni, Prince of all the Caraccioli. Leave me. Thou art banished from my presence for a year!—nay, never show thy face to me again!"

The count, not at all crestfallen, retired from the royal palace, his eyes gleaming with fiendish triumph.

In an hour he had left the city, and as he rode away he muttered:

"I have gained all I sought at this time, at least. In time—Colonna being no more—my father will bend the silly old queen to his ambition for his house. I know he often wished I were his legitimate son. And as for her protection of Cosmo I have set a bloodhound on the heels of Cosmo."

The conspirator count might well say that of the unfortunate Cosmo, for, having first warned his father not to betray him, he had whispered in the ear of the Grand Constable:

"Cosmo di Chiaramonti, late Temporary Count Del Parso, is thy hated enemy, Leonato di Chiaramonti. Use the secret as thou wilt."

(To be continued.)

THE ARCHWAY which for upwards of a century had stood over the entrance to Bream's Buildings, Chancery Lane, has been removed.

COLD ROOMS.—We like cold weather. It is bracing, and gives life and energy. But we dislike cold rooms. We can face a freezing north-west breeze, and delight in it. We enjoy a snow-storm, and do not much mind the tingling sensation when pelted with hailstones. We take a satisfaction in being the first in the morning to look at the thermometer when the mercury stands below zero. But we want all the cold out-doors—none inside. In the house give us a glowing fire, well ventilated but warm rooms—and, above all, and ever, warm, true hearts nestling around us.

THE BRITISH MUSEUM.—The building of the new Natural History Museum is going on steadily, and it is hoped that it will be completed in the course of another year. When all the birds and beasts are removed thither there will be room for about a million more books. Is it not time that some committee were appointed to determine what books should be preserved in our great national library? At present everything that is published goes there, even foolish pamphlets expected to have a place in the museum, and, more than that, to be bound, of course, at the expense of the nation.

THE OREDOXA REGIA PALM.—The splendid and luxuriant flora of Brazil produces nothing more graceful than the lofty palm known to botanists as the oreodoxa regia. Straight and slightly tapering for over sixty feet in height when fully grown, the tree then separates into a frond of remarkable beauty, as complete in form as the capital of a Corinthian column. A grove of these trees is to be seen in the public botanical garden at Rio de Janeiro, and it is difficult to imagine an object more beautiful to the eye of a lover of nature. The trees are said to be between forty and fifty years of age. The trunk of each of them is about four feet in diameter at four feet from the ground, and it goes on tapering gradually to a length of more than fifty feet, when it becomes united with another smooth thinner trunk, from ten to twelve feet in height, formed of the bright green foot stalks of the leaves, which again measure some twenty feet or more.

THE STUDENT'S LIBRARY.—A library under this title has been opened at 24, Bride Lane, Fleet Street, for the purpose of supplying scientific and professional students, and indeed general students, of every description, with every book necessary for the prosecution of their particular study. Every book in print, required for any purpose of study, is supplied to subscribers, according to their class of subscription; and every book of the same nature out of print will be

acquired by the library as soon as possible, and also supplied to subscribers. A special subscription has been arranged for all expensively illustrated works of art, architecture, civil engineering, geography or science. A reading-room has also been opened, which contains files of daily and weekly journals, all the special, professional, technical and scientific journals, and a well-selected library of reference.

AN ILL-REWARDED VETERAN.—A gentleman wrote recently to a Shrewsbury paper, calling attention to the case of a veteran of that town, aged 83, who served in the 82nd Foot in the Peninsular War, at the Battle of Waterloo, and in North America. It might be supposed that the last years of one who had deserved so well of his country were made comfortable by a grateful Government. He receives—three shillings and sixpence per week. This may seem to the regulation frugal mind a magnificent compensation for military service; but it is simply shameful that soldiers who have done good work in their time should be thrust aside when no longer able to shift for themselves.

ANTIQUITIES IN THE CRIMEA.

LAST year, near Kertch, three catacombs were discovered. One of them is situated on the northern slope of the Mithridates mount, and its interior is decorated with stucco-work and pictures in fresco, in which various animal and hunting scenes are represented. At the entrance there are visible on the side walls, where the stucco has fallen off, symbols, monograms, and figures of animals, cut with sharp tools. Mr. Lucekno, the director of the Kertch Museum, has since opened two catacombs, which, however, have proved less interesting. In the opinion of antiquaries the paintings found in the catacombs belong to an Oriental people. As evidence of this are pointed out the high head-dresses and helmets of the warriors, and the short manes of the horses, which are represented as they are on the Assyrian monuments.

As the bright colours of the pictures were becoming dimmed through contact with the damp atmosphere the entrance to the catacombs has for a time been closed in order to protect the pictures from entire destruction. In the representations of battles fighting men of two different nationalities are clearly distinguishable. One class have round beardless faces, and wear armour which covers the whole body and extends down to the ankles. Their arms consist of two lances and a round shield. The other class, their opponents, have beards and thick long hair. They are armed with bows, lances, and square shields. The bearded men appear to be the besieged, whence it may be concluded that these frescoes are the production of their beardless assailants.

On other pictures are represented bears, wild boars, stags, birds of various kinds, and plants with large broad leaves. Especially remarkable is a picture which represents an animal resembling a lion, and behind in the air a winged Cupid in a sort of Roman drapery. Besides these frescoes there have been found two small statuettes of clay, one of which represents the sitting figure of a woman, who holds in her right hand a flat cup-shaped vessel, and wears a high three-cornered head-dress. This figure has a remarkable resemblance to the stone figures of women found in the grave mounds of the steppes. The other statuette, also that of a woman, likewise wears a remarkable three-parted head-dress.

A LABOUR OF LOVE.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Of course you would recognize Mrs. Thorncliff again were she alive?" observed Lord Adderley, politely covering the baronet's bewilderment after his own gracious fashion.

"Oh, certainly I should," replied Mr. Saunders. "She had been a parishioner of mine for many years."

"Will you be so good as to relate the circumstances of her death to Sir Marcus?" continued the suave baronet; "he does not believe that she is dead."

"With pleasure, my lord. Unfortunately, Sir Marcus, there can be no doubt of the decease of your son's wife, for I was present at her death-bed. She continued to reside in Heyhurst after her marriage until the date of her death. I heard that Mrs. Thorncliff had burst a blood vessel—her lungs were always weak—and I hurried at once to her side," etc., etc.

Mr. Saunders related the dying scene with much decorum; but not one of the four present heard half he said.

By the time the whole story was told poor Sir Marcus had come to the conclusion that Marian—his Marian—had in some mysterious way been mistaken for some other Marian, and to long for the clergyman's departure that he might utter the condemnatory thoughts that arose in him.

"Please observe this lady, Mr. Saunders," said my

lord, with a tigerish snarl, as he waved his cold white hand toward Jane.

Mr. Saunders observed her—and observed to himself that such a cold, stern face had seldom been seen in one so young.

"Does she bear any resemblance to the late Mrs. Thorncliff?" demanded my lord.

"No," said Mr. Saunders, with an air of surprise, "decidedly no."

"Because the reason why Sir Marcus discredited the death of Mrs. Thorncliff was that this lady appeared at Childerwick under the name of Marian Thorncliff, wife of Colonel Thorncliff, showing the certificate of marriage which you gave into the hands of the lady who died in your presence."

Mr. Saunders coloured violently, and recoiled from the family group.

"I—I had not expected to be involved in anything of this nature," stammered he, at length. "If I have said all that is necessary you will oblige me by permitting me to retire."

He glanced at Sir Marcus as he spoke, almost turning his back upon the baron. Mr. Saunders was seriously offended at the use which had been made of him, affronted for his own sake and indignant for Sir Marcus's, in whose hard, dark visage he read both grief and amazement.

The baronet bowed—without a word the Reverend Mr. Saunders was permitted to depart.

"Are you satisfied with this proof, my dear sir?" questioned Lord Adderley, very gently. "Are you convinced that a false Marian has stepped into the place of Marian's place?"

Sir Marcus scarcely seemed to hear—he was looking at Jane.

"We shall now prove who this adventuress really is," continued the baron, as fluently and enjoyably as if he really relished the scene and had long been preparing for it. "Miss Ingrave, have the goodness to bring forward Proof the First."

Miss Ingrave's pearly hand slipped into her pocket, and keeping it there she said to Jane, in her sweetest tones:

"If you would only confess all, poor thing, how much better it would be than this exposure!"

Jane turned away with disdain.

Miss Ingrave drew forth her hand and held up Jane Vail's notebook.

"A servant found this in an old drawer in Marian's room, and not knowing what it was brought it to me," explained the young lady, putting the book in Sir Marcus's hand.

Mechanically he turned it over. It was Jane Vail's notebook, and it treated of Jane Vail's convict father.

The baronet let it drop from his hands and glared again at Jane.

"You—you gipsy!" he gasped.

"And if that does not satisfy you who she is," resumed my lord, picking up the notebook, and restoring it to Jane with a bow and a strange look into her eyes, "we shall bring forward Proof the Second."

Sir Marcus was stamping about the room. He stopped before Jane, and glowered wistfully at her, gulping down something suspiciously like a sob.

"Marian!" said he, in the queerest voice, "you know well, you jade, that you've got into my heart. Tell me the truth, girl. Is that thing yours?"

She would not answer.

He seized her shoulder and shook her.

"Eh? Do you hear?" shouted the admiring baronet. "Won't you say yes or no? D'you defy me? Of course you do. You've got too much spirit to put up with such an affront, and serves me right for asking such an impudent question!"

He released her and stamped about, vociferating horribly.

"I don't know what to think," he groaned. "I don't want to think. Confound you all round for miserable, spying, skulking lubbers!"

"Sir Marcus," observed the quiet voice of my lord, "restrain yourself. In a few minutes you will blush at your present folly. You don't wish to believe this woman an impostor! You don't wish to be convinced that she is Jane Vail! My esteemed friend, I am sorry for you, but I must force upon your attention both facts, and supplement them with a third, which will astonish you. Miss Ingrave—the Second Proof, if you please."

Miss Ingrave stepped to a curtain which hung over a portion of the polished wall and drew it aside. There smiled the lost portrait of Anthony Vail, the convict.

"Wh—what—bless me!" gasped Sir Marcus, staring with all his might.

"Do you recollect that face?" inquired my lord, softly, after a moment's interval.

"Of course I do!" growled Sir Marcus. "How did it come here? It's Vail, the marine, who struck you down on the deck of the 'Guinevere' and was court-martialled."

"Quite correct," smiled Lord Adderley. "Now

oblige me by observing the very striking and peculiar resemblance between the face of that portrait and the face of this woman. Do you see it?"

My lord's gradually warming manner and his rising excitement forced Sir Marcus, in spite of himself, to obey him. He glowered from the portrait to his favourite, and obviously detected the resemblance between the two faces.

"Is it not a significant coincidence," resumed Lord Adderley, when this point was gained, "that Anthony Vail should bear such a resemblance to the woman we accuse of being his daughter? Is it not another significant fact that she once said to yourself—yon cannot have forgotten it—that her father once was a sailor, but now his occupation was one which, if you know, you would order her from your house? Come, Sir Marcus, really you cannot remain blind to these things."

Sir Marcus burst into a roar, brought himself up with a spasmodic gulp, and stamped about, muttering angrily.

"Now for our last proof!" said my lord, his eyes gleaming like basilisks. "Proof the Third that she is Jane Vail."

His hand was on the bell, and as he spoke he rang it twice, evidently a prearranged signal.

While Miss Ingrave was dropping the curtain over the portrait the door opened, and Mr. Horseley, purple and portentous, bowed himself in.

"Have you succeeded in collecting those people?" demanded my lord, with a malicious enjoyment of the baronet's helpless look of apprehension.

"All here, your lordship," replied the emissary, darting a quick look of admiring respect at the clever adventuress who, he understood, was about to be unmoved.

"Much difficulty in the task?" demanded my lord, serenely.

"Some," replied Mr. Horseley, with a grin. "Was crossed hunting for the grandfather and the mother by a person, who was on the same lay—had to drop 'em."

"Ha, ha!" snarled my lord. "I know who he was. Our clerical friend, Mr. Gardiner"—this was said to the baronet—"who under the same bewitchment as yourself has perjured himself to befriend Jane Vail. Horseley, send them in as I ordered."

Horseley withdrew.

"Sir Marcus," said my lord, "I only ask your attention for a few minutes longer; I shall not trouble you to ask a single question; I will do all that for you. The following scene will explain itself."

Sir Marcus looked and listened as if fascinated. All his bluster had forsaken him; he looked wan and miserable; and now and again his eyes wandered to Jane with a glance of grief and wonder that was hard to bear. His spirit having died within him, my lord had it all his own way; and didn't he revel in the feast!

Miss Ingrave found a comfortable arm-chair, and, putting her eye-glass to her eye, deliberately amused herself by staring at the sad and passive face of the defeated Jane Vail.

The door opened, and an old man tottered in with an aquiline nose and a white beard flowing to his waist. Mr. Horseley announced him as Mr. Lucas Imri.

As he entered Lord Adderley adroitly stepped between him and Jane Vail, completely concealing her by his huge person.

"Mr. Imri," said he, quietly, "be good enough to relate what you know of an old man named Fairfax, his daughter Widow Vail, and his grand-daughter Jane Vail."

The old Jew in dignified and flowing language gave a brief biography of the persons named, ending with the death of Jane and the removal of her grandfather and mother to some unknown retirement.

As he finished and stood the personification of venerable meekness, with bent head and leaning on his staff waiting to be dismissed, my lord changed his position, saying, sharply :

"Look up!"

The old man lifted his eyes.

"It is Jennie Vail," whispered he, turning yellow with fright, and staggering backward he covered his eyes with his hand.

My lord opened the door and gently pushed him out; Horseley received him.

In a moment the door opened again and there entered a brutal-looking man, with a shock head and a furtive look. Him Mr. Horseley presented as Mr. Peter Gurney.

My lord civilly requested the publican to tell them when he had last seen the girl Jane Vail, keeping her concealed as before.

Mr. Gurney, divided between slavish submission to the will of the gentry and savage rebellion against the inquisition of said gentry into his private affairs, gruffly related how "Jane Vail" came to his place maybe a week before she was killed on the railway.

Urged by my lord to tell the substance of that visit—well, she had come asking after his father. And what, pray, was his father? Well, then, his father had been a convict."

"Mr. Gurney, look here!"

Mr. Gurney looked.

"Why, there she stands—Jennie Vail!"

"Pass out, Mr. Gurney."

Again the door opened, and as a small, sallow, lively female, attired irreproachably à la mode, tripped in. Mr. Horsey announced Madame Stébel.

My lord in softer accents implored madam to narrate to himself and Sir Marcus, his friend, what she knew of a young girl called Jane Vail.

Madam executed a charming reverence to monsieur and his friend, and told a very pretty, sad little tale about little Jeanne, her employee, who made flowers so well, and loved her frail mamma, and went away one day and was killed, poor child.

"Very good, madam; doubtless you will be delighted to learn that you have been mistaken. Allow me—"

Ah, madam shrieks, and falls on her knees and adores all the saints to defend her, for, behold! the spirit of poor Jeanne!

"Keep calm, madam. Horsey, take charge of this lady. Madam, this fellow will explain matters to you. Pass out, Madame Stébel."

The next entrée was of a giant with knotted hands, a brown face, and a straw in his mouth, Timothy Morse.

My lord recalled to Mr. Morse's memory that sad accident last June by which so many people lost their lives by the collision of two trains at Morley Bridge. Some one had informed "us here" that a young woman in whom "we are deeply interested," had been carried in by him from his own gate in almost a dying condition, and sheltered in his house until she was strong enough to travel.

Was this all true?

All true.

Would Mr. Morse mention the young woman's name?

Jane Vail.

Would Mr. Morse know her again?

Mr. Morse "thought he would."

"Is this she?"

"Yes, indeed! How are ye, miss? How pleased miss 'll be—"

"Enough, Mr. Morse. Pass out."

Again the door opened and a decent, elderly woman, with a prim, prudish physique, stood modestly just inside—Mary MacDonald.

His lordship merely wished her to say whether, where and when she had seen this person before.

La, yes! she had seen that person in Mr. Gardiner's house at Little Catesby, when she was his house-keeper—last July. Sure that she was not mistaken? Quite sure. She noticed and remembered the face, it was so white and sorrowful like. Differently dressed? Yes; there was a difference. Then she wore a lilac cotton gown, a black silk mantel, and a straw hat trimmed with roses. Anything like these that the young lady is showing? Yes; those are the very clothes.

"Thanks, good woman. Pass out."

"These are all my witnesses. Are they enough to convince you, Sir Marcus?" said Lord Adderley.

Sir Marcus sat strangely still. His colour had not come back yet, his gaze was riveted on the floor at his feet; he looked like a man who has received a stunning blow.

Jane Vail stood near him white as death; her eyes also were fixed on the floor in shame and grief.

The plotters regarded them triumphantly, and exchanged a smile of cruel congratulation.

"There is another disclosure yet," said Lord Adderley, insatiably heaping up destruction on his fallen adversary; "it is the key to Jane Vail's plot. Do you ever think of the insolent boy who stole Lady Annabel's heart and broke it, and who afterwards disgraced our name and sank into oblivion?"

Sir Marcus looked up with a sudden dark, vindictive glare of passion, and a red-hot glow touched his bloodless cheek.

"Do you ever think of that scene on the 'Guinevere' when Anthony Vail sprang upon me and dashed me to the deck? That was what Anthony Adderley had sunk to—that was the man who broke your wife's heart! Anthony Vail is Anthony Adderley!"

Sir Marcus rose slowly, and, walking up to my lord and looking at him, eye to eye, while the veins on his forehead stood out like whipcords and his lips grew white, tremblingly asked:

"What proof have you for this?"

"That portrait!" said my lord, involuntarily retreating a step. "Lady Thorncliff told Miss Ingrave that she painted it with her own hands in those days you well wot of. You always were denied admittance to one chamber in Childerwitch, were you not? It was the chamber where Lady Thorncliff had hung

the portrait of your rival, the chamber sacred to her because in it Anthony Adderley long ago saw her every day; the chamber in which Miss Ingrave, the night of the fire, came upon Lady Thorncliff kneeling at Jane Vail's feet, kissing her hands and calling her 'Anthony's daughter!' We who have known this all along, and sought to prove Jane Vail's imposture by any other means than a betrayal of your wife's frailty, surely deserve your belief now," and my lord ventured to place his hand softly on the baronet's shoulder.

Sir Marcus started as if an electric shock had darted through him, and stood off, glaring like a madman at Lord Adderley.

"How dare you meddle with my wife's secrets?" said he, hoarsely. "Take care, or by Heaven I'll thrash you within an inch of your life! Out of my house this instant, Lord Adderley! and the next time you venture to speak to me you'll get my answer in cold steel!"

"Sir Marcus! Sir Marcus! Beware!" cried my lord, blanching, but standing his ground. "Surely you don't know that you are insulting your oldest friend!"

"Out, I say!" thundered Sir Marcus; and a convulsive shudder ran through him, and he stretched out his long, threatening arm with the sinewy fingers working. "Out this instant, or I'll choke you! I'll strangle you! Will you—"

He marched at my lord with eyes ablaze and features distorted with the wildest fury—such a terror-striking object that my lord, after a moment's amazed consternation, gave way and backed two paces at a bound to the door.

"Quick—out of his way—he does not know what he is doing!" he hissed, pushing Miss Ingrave out ahead of him. "Sir Marcus"—he turned with burning indignation—"you've gone too far for this time! This shall not be forgotten!"

The door closed.

Sir Marcus stood a moment glaring stupidly at it, then, turning round and seeing Jane, he flung himself on a chair, laid his arm on the table, and his face on that, and so remained disconsolate.

After a long while she came to him, and, standing off, humbly whispered:

"Sir Marcus!"

He started up with a fierce exclamation.

"Go!" said he, hoarsely, avertting his bloodshot eyes from her gentle, pleading, sorrowful face. "We sail no more together."

"Hear my side now—you have only heard my enemies!" pleaded Jane.

"Begone, you fascinating demon!" exclaimed he, bitterly. "I'll be bewitched by you no more! Not a word, I say!"

She flung herself on her knees, she seized his hard, sun-browned hand, and rained kisses and tears upon it, and in bitter grief she cried:

"Oh, my dear Sir Marcus, don't judge me by all that they say! Oh, let me speak—let me speak!"

"Silence!" thundered the baronet, snatching himself from her and backing with uplifted hands and flashing eyes. "I'll be cajoled no longer, hang me if I will! March!"

She rose with a bursting sob and a blazing cheek.

He seized her by the arm—mindful even in that moment of the injuries she had received, and on whose behalf, and ready to burst with misery—and, resolutely averting his eyes from the face he liked so well, and shutting his ears to the voice of the charmer, he thrust her into the corridor and bolted the door behind her.

CHAPTER XV.

Poor, defeated Jane Vail went heavily up the grand staircase of Childerwitch for the last time, and her heart was almost breaking.

She had come here hating, she must go hence loving, having outraged the generous heart of a man who would have stood her friend for ever.

She must go, cut to the soul by that edged tool with which she had rashly attempted to play—deception.

My lady could not speak for her—Sir Marcus was so outraged by her falsehood that he believed the worst her father's enemy could say against her. Where now could the convict's daughter apply?

She put away all the rich dresses, the jewels, and the luxuries which had been her portion as Lawky Thorncliff's wife; she donned the plainest travelling-dress she had, put a few shillings in her purse, that she might at least have means to get away from Haythorpe-in-the-Marsh without scandalizing the dignity of the family, hid her ill-fated note-book in her pocket, and was ready.

While she was making these hurried preparations Miss Ingrave glided into the room. Jane stopped in what she was doing, and, coldly, haughtily drawing herself up, said:

"Why do you intrude? Do you suppose that I

am so crushed that I will suffer insolence from you?"

The glorious flush of the honest eye, and the majesty of the innocent brow, were irresistible. Miss Ingrave cowered.

"I mean no insult," said she, hastily. "I am forced to come for the sake of appearances; the servants need not know under what circumstances you leave us, need they?"

"Miss Ingrave," answered Jane, very quietly, "you and your friend have succeeded in depriving me of a shelter which I fraudulently obtained that I might work for my dear father's release. It was right that I should be sharply punished for doing what I knew was wrong, even though my motive was a good one. Heaven has permitted you to be the instruments of my punishment; but do not think that Heaven will allow evil to triumph over good. Henceforth I shall work for my end above-board—no subterfuges, no deceptions; and do you doubt that Heaven will bless me with success at last? Ah! you have not crushed me, you have struck from my limbs the vile chains with which I foolishly bound myself. Like my friend, the rector of Little Catesby, at last I am free to do right—my chain is broken."

"I care nothing for your success or your failure," said Annabel, with a dark look of hatred, "except so far as it affects my interests. Succeed, if you can, by all means, but, if you wish to be left free to do so, let the grand finale until my marriage with Dimon Adderley."

By the falling eyelids, and the blushing cheeks, and the nervous twining of Miss Ingrave's hands, her heart spoke then.

"Surely you know," said Jane, "that when Anthony Adderley, the convict, is reprieved, Dimon Adderley must restore all to him—must leave Eywood. Chase a ruined man? Will your love cling to him then?"

"You think me altogether a demon, don't you?" said Annabel, bitterly. "Then you are wrong. I am capable of dying of love for that man. Oh, Jane Vail, you must not come between us!"

She clasped her hands beseechingly, and drew close to Jane as if she would throw herself at her feet.

"What do you mean?" said Jane, coldly. "What can I do?"

"Don't let Lord Adderley trace your hiding-place!" whispered Miss Ingrave, impressively. "Keep out of his way."

"I defy Lord Adderley!" returned Jane, scornfully. "If you knew all you would not," whispered Annabel, a spasm of anguish contracting her lovely countenance—"he loves you!"

Jane started back with a cry of horror. By that fierce flare from Miss Ingrave's eyes, as the words came one by one from her whitening lips, wrung from a writhing heart, Jane believed the truth at last.

Satisfied with the effect of her announcement, Miss Ingrave glided to the door. A servant met her. Sir Marcus had sent to tell Mrs. Thorncliff that the carriage was ready.

"Take plenty of wraps with you," said Miss Ingrave, for the benefit of Mrs. Trim and Susan, who were hovering near, devoured with curiosity, for, to use their own words, the 'ouse might 'a been a 'otel, the way it were thrown open to the public that morning; scarce a room you could go into but there was some stranger sitting waiting, with that dog-man coming the chief over 'em all, as if he were head servant in Childerwitch—"take plenty of wraps with you; your journey will be a cold one, especially on the railway, for the train does not reach London until ten o'clock. Of course the colonel meets you last."

"Going away, ma'am?" queried the housekeeper, all agape—"and my lady so bad?"

"Only for a day or two," said Miss Ingrave, suavely. "Don't trouble Mrs. Thorncliff, she has heard bad news from the colonel. A wife's first duty is to her husband."

Going downstairs she glided by Jane's side, whispering:

"It is there Dimon will look for you first—don't go to Colonel Thorncliff."

Jane hesitated a moment by my lady's door; then love overcame her, and she stole in.

My lady was still asleep, Mrs. Garnet softly fanning her. Jane crept in, bent over her and kissed her.

"Good-bye, sweet, good, loving Lady Thorncliff!" she whispered. "Heaven knows whether I may ever see you again."

So she passed out, sore-hearted.

Not a glimpse did she get of the baronet. Evidently he was resolved that the siren who had bewitched him once should have no chance to try her arts again.

It would have been ludicrous to observe the state

which surrounded the exodus of the penniless Jennie Vail had anybody been there to look beneath the surface and take the situation in.

There stood the vast family coach with its ginger-coloured brocade linings and its crest as big as a plate warmer; Jones, white-gloved and white-stockinged, holding the coach door open; Dodge seated immovably on the box in his cape and cockade, solemnly gripping the reins of the gigantic sleek pair, which champed and nodded in their gilded trappings; a maid with an armful of rugs and shawls, which a footman was taking from her and running down the steps with, to dispose inside the coach; and Miss Ingrave in her pearly robes and sapphire ribbons, sweetly wishing Mrs. Thorncliff a good journey and a safe return; when the fact was that the pale, pre-occupied young lady in the neat travelling suit was just a poor, harassed, bewildered Cinderella after the clock struck twelve!

"Where to, ma'am?" inquired Jones, when she was seated.

Where to, indeed?

Where would she be safe from Dimon Adderley? How could she escape from his vigilant eye?

Miss Ingrave solved the enigma for her.

"To the railway station," said she, with a meaning look at Jane, "and stay with her until you see her off."

They rumbled away.

When they were beyond the gates of Childerwitch a horseman passed the window, looking in.

It was my Lord Adderley!

Jane grew faint with terror.

Driven from Childerwitch, the instant she passed its gates she fell into this man's hands! Horrified and desperate she resolved to baulk him at all hazards.

She ordered Dodge to drive to the telegraph office, alighted, and sent off this telegram to Colonel Thorncliff:

"I have failed and am in extreme danger. Come if you can and tell me what to do. I am at the 'Thorncliff Arms'."

As Jane took her seat in the coach again my lord was waiting patiently by its side.

She ordered Dodge to drive her to the hotel she had named to the colonel; and when she alighted there my lord was at her elbow with his loathsome smile of triumph and his soft accents.

"Will Mrs. Thorncliff allow me a few moments' conference?"

Jane drew back with chilling hauteur.

"Dodge," she said, pointedly, "tell Miss Ingrave that you left me here with Lord Adderley."

"I beg your pardon," interrupted my lord, considerably disconcerted. "Allow me the pleasure of bearing any message to Miss Ingrave—in five minutes I shall be returning to Childerwitch."

Then, lowering his tone, he said, insolently:

"My clever cousin, we really must come to some understanding before we part, so why delay the interview?"

Dodge was waiting with as stolid an air as his aroused curiosity would permit. Jane therefore answered, in audible tones:

"It is quite useless, Lord Adderley; go your way and I shall go mine. I think that is all that need be said."

And with a freezing bow she turned finally from him and disappeared into the dull, dreary hotel.

My lord stood a minute in a grim reverie; but when the baronet's coach was out of sight he called to his groom to take his horse to the stables; then he strode into the "Thorncliff Arms," and ordering some stationery set down and wrote Jane a letter.

Jane sent the letter back unopened with a line in pencil:

"I have nothing to say to Lord Adderley."

Lord Adderley settled himself for a protracted siege.

In her locked room Jane sat patiently waiting Colonel Thorncliff's arrival. The first train by which he could come after receiving her telegram would not arrive until two o'clock in the morning.

Would Lord Adderley stay till then?

Jane made all her little plans; she would implore the stern but just soldier to take up her cause; she would fly to London, while he held my lord in check, and hide herself for a time until the storm of Sir Marcus's wrath was past, and then she might obtain one interview of my lady and hear all the missing links in Anthony Adderley's history supplied.

She had not waited two hours when another letter was handed her—not addressed by Lord Adderley. She hesitated, suspecting a ruse to force her into reading some hypocritical proposition of his. The waiter, seeing her irresolution, told her that Sir Marcus's coachman had brought it.

Then she opened it and read:

"Come back, you jade, and give us your version."

"MARCUS THORNCLIFF."

No ruse—there was his own well-remembered scrawl.

Her heart leaped.

The tide had turned in her favour. The coach was waiting for her; she had nothing to fear.

She left a message for Colonel Thorncliff, enclosing his father's laconic epistle, and descended.

My lord had vanished.

She took her seat amid a crowd of admiring villagers who surrounded the majestic Thorncliff ark, and they moved off stately.

The tide had turned in her favour. Give her time and she should tell her wrongs and her father's wrongs in such language that the old grudge would be forgotten and Sir Marcus would burn to do his rival justice.

In the middle of these reflections the carriage came to a halt.

Jones appeared at the door.

"That will do, Jones," said a malicious voice, which made her start. "You may resume your seat. Mrs. Thorncliff"—and Lord Adderley's emerald eyes peered in—"will you honour me with five minutes' conversation before you return to Childerworth?"

Ay, he could drop his insolent tones now that she was recalled to the favour and protection of Sir Marcus.

Jane coldly bowed.

"Would it be too much," continued my lord, with increasing anxiety, "to ask—to entreat a few words apart from those fellows, that the honour of our house may be preserved?"

The honour of "our house."

Jane checked the refusal that was upon her lips, and smiled exultantly.

"You have *nothing* to fear," pursued my lord, still more humbly. "Sir Marcus's servants are quite protection enough," and he laughed at his little joke. "You are a brave woman, and I am, I trust, a gentleman."

Jane began to hesitate.

"I will give you important information concerning your father," whispered my lord, "if you will allow me this opportunity."

"Why?" asked Jane.

"Because I am run to the wall, and must cry 'quarter.' Sir Marcus is going to take up your case; you will have powerful friends to back you; you will inevitably succeed. With your astute mind, madam, you must see that my wisest course is to conciliate you by the relation of some vital facts which can never be reached except through me—and never through me to other than yourself."

Jane stepped out of the coach, and walked a little way.

My lord followed her some twenty paces back on the road they had come, and joined her on the grassy path beneath the trees.

"Say what you have to say, quickly, Lord Adderley!" cried Jane, looking at him with eyes as sharp as needles.

"Shall we walk a little farther from those fellows?" suggested my lord, pacing a little.

"No," answered Jane, bluntly. "I distrust you, and you know I have had cause. Don't make me distrust you more, or I'll go back to the carriage this instant."

My lord shrugged his shoulders, smiled, and deliberated.

"Admirable woman!" aspirated he; "your regard for appearances almost equals your courage. Hullo, there!"

At that imperious cry Sir Marcus's servants looked round.

"Drive on!" roared my lord, in a loud voice; "we will walk!"

For a moment after this audacious command was given Jane stood stupidly aghast; but when she saw Jones spring to his place beside Dodge the reality of her situation burst upon her, and she made a frightened rush forward, screaming:

"No! no! stop!"

But my lord was too quick for her.

Before her voice was well raised his huge person was between her and the men, his strong palm was on her mouth, stifling her cries.

In half a minute the huge family ark had lumbered far, far down the black road out of sight.

When nothing more was to be seen or heard of it my lord released her, and stood off, with folded arms, enjoying her consternation.

From gazing frantically up and down the empty road Jane's eyes came back to the smiling, treacherous face of her enemy; and so they stood for a few seconds, silent.

Then said Jane, her colour rising, and her eyes flashing:

"You said you were a gentleman, but you're not. You're a coward—a coward, sir—and I despise you from my very soul!"

And she shook with very hatred.

My lord unfolded his arms, and made her a mocking bow.

"Thanks, my sweet girl, for your finely expressed opinion of me!" drawled he, gaily. "Your candour carries my heart by storm!"

He grasped her arm, and stooped over her so suddenly that his face was within a few inches of her own; and there was that in his craving eyes, and flushed skin, and hot breath, which well might curdle the blood of any defenceless woman, be her courage what it may.

Jane bounded back from his clutch, and, with one gasp of horror, shot past him, and after the coach.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed my lord, like a hyena; "that's well done, brave girl! What pretty feet! What a famous runner!" and with half a dozen strides he was running by her side, like the demon shadow of the haunted baron of Rheims legend.

When this pastime had lasted long enough (which it very soon did, for terror made her feet of foot and he had no mind to venture too near the house) he snatched her up like a toy and plunged among the trees, where, secure from possible observation, he strode along with the speed of a stag.

Exhausted for the time by her flight, Jane could only struggle feebly, while her hands grasped at every branch and twig within their reach, in the vain endeavour to hinder their progress.

Presently they came out upon the bleak and lonely marsh-lands which led across in barren desolation to the village, and now Lord Adderley set down his burden upon a bank of heath and seated himself close beside her.

"Come, my pretty beggar girl!" said he, softly; "surrender at once and own yourself outwitted. Who's victor now?" and he crushed her in his loathed arms to his breast, while fierce exultation lit up his face with fiendish joy.

Jane freed one hand by a violent effort, and struck him on the cheek with all her force.

"Ha! ha! ha!" shouted my lord, absolutely transported with delight, "that's good, my darling. Strike as hard as you like! I love your blows better than another woman's kisses. By Jove! you've made a conquest of me by your spirit. I love a shrew—a fearless shrew like you! Come now, we'll make terms, my dear. I long to serve you, pretty Jennie, grandad's pride and mother's joy. What shall it be?"

—the worship of Dimon Adderley, or—or his vengeance?"

Jane Vail knew that she had nothing to hope for—that the monster beside her knew not mercy or compunction, yet she writhed back from him, and with eyes which positively glared upon him with a true woman's indignation, smote him again, ay, and with such stinging force that she left the blood-red print of her hand upon the craven cheek.

"You *mix!*" panted my lord, imprisoning her hands with loathsome gentleness. "By Heaven! you're worth taming. If I did not know it would please you too well, I'd give a kiss for every blow! But no, sweetheart—you must not scream—I shall take every attempt at a scream as an invitation to stop those lovely lips with mine. So?" but though he made a faint of kissing her, he was too wary of those flaming eyes to touch her in her present mood.

"Now," continued he, getting tired of her contemptuous silence, "what's your choice? If you don't answer me within the next minute, I'll take silence for consent—egad I will!"

"I'd die first!" shuddered poor Jennie, with the hair rising on her head; "and well you know it, you poor, abject apology for a human creature, let alone a man!"

"Well said, Mistress Vixen!" chuckled my lord. "There spoke your blood and breeding, my dear! On my honour you're more charming than all the handsome drawing-room dolls I ever met! I'd rather see your spitfire little face at Eywood than a hundred such as Annabel's!"

"Don't dare to speak to me of Eywood!" cried she. "Are you not ashamed to remind me how you roll in its wealth while its rightful owner pines in prison?"

"You'll be its mistress, won't you, darling, whether the convict ever is its master or not—eh, Jennie?"

"Death first!" gasped Jane, putting her hands to her ears.

"Very well; death be it!" exclaimed Lord Adderley, fiercely, and he snatched her up and dragged her along across the fens.

Well then, here was the helpless girl being hurried she knew not whither, by the man who thirsted for her destruction. Her brave heart stood still with fear, and her senses began to forsake her.

After some twenty minutes my lord suddenly stopped, set her on her feet, and bade her look at something.

She saw a pale, grayish vapour rising up from a white pool like an exhalation, and this white pool was almost at her feet.



[LORD ADDERLEY'S REPULSE.]

"Do you know where you are, girl?" asked my lord, in a voice no longer gentle.

"Yes, among the lime-pits."

And Jane felt a crawling horror steal through every vein.

In all her fever-dreams had she ever come to anything so terrible as standing on the brink of this white, smoking pool with Dimon Adderley?

Well might she tremble! Around them on every side spread the lonely marsh; before them the hillocks of sand, the burning lime, a few workmen's empty sheds, and some spades; beside them a sluggish stream, crawling under sedgy banks.

"This is a fine quiet place in which to finish our conference—isn't it, you wixen?" gibed my lord; "you may scream your loudest here, and there's no one but me to enjoy the music. Go on, darling!"

And he folded his arms and placed himself in an attitude of comfort.

"What have you brought me here for?" asked Jane, her face white as death.

"To hear your answer, madam—to hear your final answer."

"You give me a choice between dishonour or death."

"Fie! my darling! what harsh words you use! To call a soft life and a gay one at Eywood Chase with its master your slave; horses, servants, gold at your command; silk and velvet, jewels and ermine to wear; operas, balls, and the Row to enjoy—dishonour! Fie! Jennie—fie!"

"And the alternative?" asked Jane, turning with loathing from his craving, eager gaze.

His large hand, pale as the hands of the dead, pointed into the seething pool where the livid rings of smoke ascended, but his lips remained dumb.

Her fate was declared at last!

Thus he would seal her lips—with the kiss of degradation, and, failing that, the lime-pit, where never more would she be seen on earth except as a blue vapour creeping heavenward after her soul!

Jane bowed her face in her hands in very anguish of heart, and cruel memory flashed before her eyes the white face of her mother, childless for ever—the broken form of the old man tottering alone to his grave—the chains of her father grating heavily, and never to be struck off by daughter's hand; all lost—all lost if she refused, and for a moment—

Now, brave Jennie, may Heaven stand close by thee through this fiery trial!

And the moment passed, and she faced him with a tremour—faced him until he blanched with awe—towered over him until he shrank back like a beaten cur.

"Fiend!" cried she, in a voice of majesty, "insult me no longer by your touch or I shall do my best to tear you to pieces! Murder me if you must, coward. I will listen to no terms!"

"What? You choose death?" gasped my lord.

"I do."

"But I—I love you, girl! I cannot live without you—you must come with me to Eywood Chase!"

"Never with you, villain!"

"Oh, Jennie, Jennie, listen to me—"

"Silence!" exclaimed Jane, and with a hand nerved by outraged innocence she struck him on the mouth.

It was well done, for Jennie forgot all about fine-ladyism, and my lord spat a tooth into his cambric handkerchief before he could gurgle even an exclamation.

Covered with discomfiture he threw her from him, and strode up the nearest sandhill, where putting a whistle to his lips he whistled two or three times.

What that portended Jane knew not; she saw her chance—poor one, but worth the venture.

She darted away in the opposite direction, where the smoke of the village blurred the horizon, and ran with all her speed along the river's brink.

She heard my lord's shout of taunting laughter, and his swift rush after her, but she had the start of him; the night was thickening, and despair lent her the fleetness of a hare, so that in one minute she hoped to be swallowed up from sight.

The river made a tiny bend, and one scraggy spruce tree came between her and her pursuer—in that moment she doubled—ran back a few steps—and plunging among the tall flags and bulrushes of the river's brink, cowered down with her heart beating to suffocation and the pulses in her ears deafening her.

Anon she heard his heavy feet bounding by and making the earth tremble beneath his weight. On he went out of hearing, but soon came back, breathing heavily and rustling the flags with his hands, now close to her, now far away.

Meantime two ruffian-looking fellows came out of a distant shed, and hastened to join my lord, with every appearance of concern, to judge by their obsequious tones.

"Has she bolted?" said one.

"Has she gone and drowned herself?" queried the other.

"She's hidden somewhere between that point and this tree," answered my lord, indicating with his hand. "Club-fist Dick, you begin here; and, Dark Dan, you begin there; and search until you meet, while I keep a watch."

The search commenced just two feet below the trembling girl's hiding-place, and for half an hour they threaded every flag up and down the margin of the river, while my lord sat on a hillock and swore at their ill success. Then he called them, and with a savage oath said:

"Don't budge from this place, either of you, until I come back. By Heaven, I'll fetch my bloodhound, Warrior, from the Chase, and put a stop to this nonsense. If she comes out before my return, secure her, and carry her quietly to the Chase, entering by the fish-pond gate—you understand? But if she is going to give trouble, or people are likely to interfere, just put her out of the way comfortably."

And, in the significant pause which followed, Jane could guess that all three were measuring the lime-pit with their eyes to judge if it was deep enough to hide her calcined bones, and she grew faint at the thought.

"Nothing easier," quoted one of the rascals, with evident satisfaction.

"Your lordship'll give us the tin to stock the sheep farm in California?" queried the other, cautiously.

"Oh, you're all right—don't be uneasy, my fine fellow," returned my lord, condescendingly; "I have power to protect you whatever happens. Should the girl's stubbornness compel you to proceed to extremities, don't come to Eywood Chase. Get off to Greenwich as quickly as possible, and telegraph to me from there. Stay! I will tell you what words to employ:

"To **LORD ADDERLEY**:—A poor man out of work solicits aid. DANIEL GRIGOR.

"P.O., Greenwich."

"That will bring you an order for one hundred pounds, and you can take the first emigrant ship that sails. Do we understand each other?"

"Yes, your lordship."

"Most partic'lar plain I should say, my lord." Lord Adderley strode over the quaking fens, and was heard no more.

"Are he coming back with the dog to hunt her out, or aren't he?" quoth Daniel.

"I should say he would rather than he wouldn't," was the reply.

"Dash it if I like it!" said the conscientious Mr. Grigor, "on'y that a man must 'ave his bread, or starve!"

The night was falling—the wind moaning like a lost child over the moor—when the two men seated themselves on a sandbank, lit their pipes, and commenced their watch for the poor, quaking fugitive hidden in the watery jungle.

(To be continued.)



[CORA'S STORY.]

SHIFTING SANDS.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Elvina; or, the Gipsy's Curse," "The Snapt Link," "The Lost Coronet," etc., etc.

CHAPTER LXV.

Be still, be still, poor human heart,
What fitful fever shakes thee now?
The earth's most lovely things depart,
And who art thou?
Thy spring than earth's doth sooner fade,
Thy blossoms first with poison fill,
To sorrow born, for suffering made,
Poor heart, be still.

THE Lady Marian Biddulph, now Countess of Marston, had arranged her affairs as only a nature driven to its own resources could have so calmly and wisely managed. The house had been given up and her father's body prepared for its last resting-place by the persons who had been summoned from a distance to conclude its last sad rites.

And now the end was approaching, and its very crisis seemed to deepen to the utmost the grief and the bitter, self-reliant frigidity of the orphan's demeanour.

Cold, unvarying, unimpassioned she seemed to all around her.

Even the old housekeeper did not pretend to comprehend the cause of her young lady's change of manner, her stony expression, her absence of any outward betrayal of grief in the trying duties that related so constantly to the dead and gone, the sole object who had claimed from her a close and undisturbed attention and love.

But so it was. And the faithful housekeeper felt a painful sympathy and alarm for the heiress of her beloved family, whom she had loved from her childhood, as a faithful dependent.

It was the very eve of the day when the whole household were to leave the villa that had proved to be of such little avail for the restoration of the invalid's health.

Lady Marian had given her last orders for the conclusion of the preparations for departure, and then, throwing on her hat and large mantle, she left her room to seek relief in a long stroll among the haunts which had been familiar and dear to her since her residence in that lovely retreat.

Aston met her on her way to the side door, which was the outlet to her favourite garden.

"Dear young lady," she said, "please do not go out this dismal evening. What is the use when we are going away so soon, never to come back? And indeed it is time since no one is left to take any care of

heed of you here, and in England there are plenty of people who will only be too glad to wait on you and to tend you as your humble servants."

The young countess gave a faint smile.

"I daresay, Aston, I daresay, but for what? For rank and wealth, which they covet, not for myself. Even you, my faithful Aston, my second mother as I might almost call you, would be ready to desert me were one of your own beloved family to appear on the scene. Your affection would scarcely bear that test, would it?" she went on, with a sad, wan smile.

Aston shook her head.

"Hush, hush, my lady," she replied. "It's ill talking of the past and the dead; they are gone, long, long since, all those I have served and loved. And you stand in their place, and are the only one left for whom I care to live. But, were such a miracle to happen, and the dead return to life, and you were to need me and they did not, my lady, then you'd find that I would never desert you. I'd stand closer to you in your adversity than in your prosperity and greatness!"

Lady Marian put her hand in Aston's thin palm, and the tears sprang in her eyes, albeit it was long months since she had yielded to such a melting mood.

"Well, well, I may need such fidelity even now, Aston. It is but a barren height, sometimes, this greatness that people envy so blindly. But no more of this; it does but make me weak when I most need firmness and support."

And with a kindly nod and smile she passed on, and in another moment was in the dim, misty air of a moist day.

She hastened on, for the afternoon was fast closing in, and she wished to complete her farewell to the more memorable spots connected with her residence at Cannes. The temporary grave of her late father, and the place where she had last encountered Rupert Falconer, were those that thus interested her fancy, or her heart.

No word of the change in the young stranger's fortunes had reached her in her seclusion—she did but think of him as one who had cast a singular and wayward spell over her whole nature, and for whom she would willingly have renounced rank and wealth for love and companionship.

And if her thoughts dwelt on others who had crossed her path, and it may be interested her youthful fancy, they faded away like fleeting phantoms before the more vivid image of the least known and the least dazzling of the memories of the past.

At length she reached the well-known spot; she almost expected to see the form of the handsome stranger advancing as he had done on that memo-

rable day which had never yet passed from her memory.

Could it be the creation of her own fancy, or a realization of her dreams that met her eyes, on her arrival at the glen-like valley?

But certainly there was a form there, and of about a contour and age that would have served to represent the young unknown. But the back was turned towards her, and Marian stole gently and noiselessly along as if fearful that the illusion would vanish, or that disappointment would await her on her nearer approach to the stranger visitant.

But there was a crackling sound of leaves under her steps that attracted the motionless and apparently sleeping figure, as it half reclined on the green turf. The head was sharply raised, then the young man started to his feet, and the next moment "Ernest" "Marian" burst from the lips of the young countess and the fugitive companion and playmate of her earlier years.

He was changed—far more than the girl herself—since they parted.

True, the deep mourning she wore somewhat altered the character of her features and expression, but still she had little of such change when compared to the chastened and long-tried earl.

There was a calm thoughtfulness stamped on his brow, a firm sadness on the lips that spoke of the elevating effect of trial on a young and impulsive character.

And Marian recognized involuntarily that he was not the volatile and impetuous being of former days.

"I am thankful you are safe, Ernest," she said, recovering herself more quickly than her companion.

"But it is certainly an astonishment to see you here."

"And equally so to me, Marian," he returned, quickly. "I have been so shut up from every means of gaining tidings of the outer world that I had no idea of your being so far away from your own house, still less of your wearing that mournful dress," he added, glancing at the heavily draped robe she wore. "Surely you are not—alone?" he went on, hesitatingly.

"I am an orphan," she replied, calmly. "I am very desolate now, Ernest."

He was touched—perhaps it might be said even reproached by that sad tone and look. Yet it was rather for him to recall in that same tone that the heiress had shown little courage, or trust, or affection in the hour of his utmost need.

"I am grieved, very grieved," he said, quietly. "Once indeed it might have been possible for me to show something besides empty sorrow as a consolation—now I am helpless for aught save words."

A haughty, suspicious scorn contracted the brow of the young countess.

"Am I to suppose then that you, the Earl of Belfort, the descendant of a long and noble race, have married an obscure adventuress, Ernest? It would pain me to think that my childhood's friend should be so weak and unworthy," she added, proudly, as if to save herself from the least suspicion of personal interest in his doing.

"I am not so happy, Lady Marian," he said, coldly. "Cora St. Croix is not so easily won, and I have learned to estimate better her claims and my own than to wish her to take on her a clouded, disgraced name. And," he continued, anxiously, "I am here on the fruitless errand of discovering her present residence that I might give her a chance of knowing her parentage before she gives to any one the priceless treasure of her hand."

The young countess started slightly.

"Do you mean," she said, "that you have any clue to her birth? I thought it was hopelessly concealed."

"I believe there is some possibility of its discovery," said Ernest, gravely. "But why should you be so interested in it, Marian? It can little affect the high-born heiress of the Biddulphs what may be a poor foundling's real family. And yet," he went on, "there are strange rumours of marvellous events flying about this very neighbourhood. Have you heard that Lord Treville has identified a long-lost son in Cora St. Croix's first guardian, and that he is already married to Notta Carew? One at least of my errors, if it could be so called, has been redressed by her good fortune. Her heart has not suffered because I was not prepared to marry a pretty doll."

Marian's very lips whitened at the tidings. She had been prepared for the shock that Notta Carew's marriage might perhaps have given to her depressed nerves. She knew but too well that she would have sacrificed rank and wealth for the sake of the man who had caught her heart as it were in the rebound from disappointed affection. But now to find that there would have been a brilliant future for her with the man of her choice, that he would have been her equal in station as well as in personal attributes was almost too severe a trial for her to endure unmoved.

"The days of romance appear to be returning," she said, scornfully. "Perhaps the next of these startling revelations will be that Miss St. Croix is the representative of some noble family, but I do not happen to know of any one who has lost an heiress, do you, Ernest?"

Lord Belfort looked at her with a reproachful surprise that was the severest reproof she could have received.

"I am afraid I have been too much engaged with my own matters to bestow much attention on the history of others," he replied, calmly, "but I shall certainly try to repay the service I have received from Cora St. Croix, even if my own life be clouded for ever. I only wish I could prove myself a little more worthy of her," he went on, impotently, "instead of being a mere puppet, whom fortune has placed in some kind of distinction, not merit."

"You have my best wishes, of course, my lord, for the success of your endeavours in both attempts," was the young countess's cold retort. "For myself I am afraid I am content to remain in the despicable position of a lady, even with the discreditable adjunct of a title."

She turned to leave him at the gate, with a partly extended hand, which Ernest took in both his with a kindly pressure.

"Farewell, Marian, I can perhaps understand your bitterness, in your lonely greatness, better than you do yourself. Heaven bless you, dear girl," he said, with a frank, brotherlike air that was difficult to resist. "And may you have softer, sweeter blessings than the rank and wealth you prize so much. I can never forget our childish affection. We have neither brother nor sister. We should be drawn to each other by such loneliness to supply such ties."

Marian's proud heart perhaps softened at the gentle tone and words.

But the galling, fevered wound of her nature was as yet unsubdued in its smarting pain.

And with an unyielding reserve that she afterwards would have given years of life to recall she drew her hand away with a simple:

"Farewell, Lord Belfort; I for one only wish to forget the past with all its sorrows and vexations. It is no pleasant memory. I wish you a happy future," she added, in a more broken voice, as if emotion were obtaining some mastery.

And then she rapidly passed from the spot.

Ernest gazed after her in sad yet disapproving astonishment.

"Cora, Cora, why dost everything tend to raise my opinion of you, to confirm my belief in your superiority to your sex? Alas! alas! it does but deepen my love, while I know it can never be in-

dulged in happiness and joy. I am not the one to win that noble heart," he murmured, sadly, as he, in his turn, walked from the spot of that memorable interview.

CHAPTER LXVI.

God bless those cheery mariners,
And temper all the gales
That sweep against the rocky coast
To their storm-shattered sails.
And men on shore will bless the ship
That could so guide I be,
Safe in the hollow of his hand,
To brave the mighty sea.

"WELL, Cora, it is your own doing, remember, if you do leave us," said Mrs. Falconer, sharply, as the girl, whom she had once brought up as her own, prepared for final adieu to her childhood's home.

The orphan listened to the reproach in silence, and Adèle interposed—her mother could speak again.

"Well, I am sure, it is much better that she should go, mother; she is far too grand for us, though she may be a common sailor's daughter for ought we know. And there has been a regular fate against us ever since she came. I'm sure I hope I shall never see her any more; I'm annoyed and ill-used enough as it is, without having any more to bear. You made me as well as yourself ridiculous at that Lord Treville's, which was enough to madden me," she went on, angrily, in spite of her mother's desperate casting looks.

"Be content. So far as I am concerned we will never meet again, Adèle," said Cora, calmly, "but yet, but yet I would gladly, thankfully change fate with you. At least, you have a mother, while I am alone and desolate. Farewell, let us part in amity, not in anger."

And she pressed her lips to the brow of the old woman, whom she had regarded as a mother for many a long year.

Then she turned to Adèle with a wistful glance.

"Adèle, will you not forget and forgive, if you think there is any ground of offence or estrangement between us? I shall never cross your path more, never give you more cause for vexation and pique. Will you not let our last minutes and memories be of peace and kindlyness?"

Perhaps had she looked less beautiful, less fascinating and distinguished in even Adèle's jaundiced eyes she might have met a warmer response. As it was, the young French girl simply gave a cold return to Cora's affectionate embrace.

"You know best what you have done, Cora," she replied. "It is not for me to remind you now you have ruined every one you have met. I quite agree with you that we are better apart, and I am sure I will willingly forgive you on that condition."

And Adèle coldly returned the embrace of the departing girl.

Cora paused for a brief minute.

It seemed like cutting the ground from her feet, like breaking the bridge which connected her with the past to quit that well-remembered home.

But luckily the very repelling coldness of the mother and daughter strengthened the fortitude with which she met the trial.

"At least you may as well tell us where you intend to go," observed Mrs. Falconer, rather uneasily.

Cora could only repress a bitter smile as she returned:

"I am going into the world. It will not be more wide or desolate than I have before known it," was the calm reply. "Farewell. Only let me be at peace, let me forget all the miserable past."

She passed from the cottage as she spoke, and in another moment the door closed between her and the associations of the past, the sole link with her early years, the man she once loved so fondly, and the whole ties that might be considered as a claim to the affection and care of her sex and her kind.

It was a pang, a sharp pang, that tore the very fibres from her heart.

But it was bravely borne.

And the girl passed calmly on to the steamer that was about to start for the English coast, and to which her modest baggage had been previously conveyed.

Once before she had left the French shores in a similar manner. But then she had been guarded by a manly and powerful companion, who had smoothed every obstacle and made luxurious every hardship that could have hindered her path. Now she was alone, unprotected and uncared for.

Was it wonder if the inclement weather was rather in accordance with her feelings than the brightness of that moonlight night when she and Sibbald Carew had sailed over the calm sea, and scarcely felt a ripple beneath their feet?

Cora had been as it were cradled in storms, her whole life had been coloured by that one terrible tempest that had left her an orphan.

Now the wind was rising rapidly, and the steamer

tossed heavily as the waves foamed and dashed upon it with continually increasing force.

All had gone below of the weaker sex save Cora; and she remained on deck, as if rather enjoying the fierce war of the elements than alarmed at their power.

The captain at last appeared to notice that slight form and to wonder at its presence in the stormy war around.

"Young lady, will you not go below?" he said, coming to her in a lull of the wind. "It is no fitting place for you to be here."

"I am not afraid. I like it. It chokes me below," she said, quickly.

"Afraid, well, there's no cause, I am happy to say," he returned, smiling, "but still it is not the right place for you, so young and delicate as you look. Come, be persuaded, go below; there's plenty to do there, I expect," he went on, earnestly.

Cora hesitated no longer. She heard some moans from the cabin that more than confirmed the captain's words.

"I will go if I can be of use," she said, quickly.

"Is there no one to take care of you?" he said, "no one who should be ministering to your comfort instead of leaving you here?"

"No one. I am my own mistress," she said. "I am free to go and come or place myself in any danger I may choose. You need have no alarm on that account, if I am wanted by less disengaged persons," she added, with a laugh that had so much of bitterness as to attract involuntarily the captain's attention.

But his duties called him to his post, and after conducting the girl to the top of the cabin stairs he returned to his anxious watch.

The girl steadily descended the stairs in spite of the rolling, pitching vessel, and soon found herself in the midst of a group of terrified sufferers, who scarcely could have told whether the mental or bodily pangs were more difficult to endure.

"Moans of agony, petitions for help, groans of sickness or of alarm sounded from every side, and for a few brief moments Cora was in doubt which was in most need of her attention, and to whom to offer help. But as she examined the various persons in question she was most strongly attracted to a pale, delicate-looking woman of some forty or fifty years of age but still not without traces of former beauty and present refinement, though there was a certain feebleness of expression that told of little strength of character and endurance.

She was lying on a corner of the sofa, her head resting helplessly on a cushion, her breath gasping from the mingled suffering of the terrible "mal du mer" and the yet more dreadful terror of the gathering storm.

No one seemed to be in waiting on her, though Cora could guess from the jewellery she wore that her wealth and position might well have entitled her to some such luxury.

And Cora went gently up to her side with the grace that was so characteristic of her every movement.

"Can I do anything for you; are you very ill?" she asked, gently.

"Thanks. I am, indeed, very ill. I do not think I can survive this frightful passage," returned the lady, in a soft, plaintive voice.

"Oh, yes, do not be afraid; there is no danger the captain has just told me," said Cora, cheerfully. "Can you not take something?" she added, glancing round. "You look so exhausted and faint."

"I think I might, but my maid is ill, and I cannot get at my travelling bag," said the invalid; "there is wine in it, which will be more fit to take than this dreadful ship's poison."

"Where is it; will you trust me to fetch it?" asked Cora.

The lady looked earnestly at her for the first time and seemed to recognize her pretensions to some kind of equality in manner at any rate if not in birth, for she said, more softly:

"Thank you very much; if you would take the trouble I should indeed be obliged; I am very, very ill."

And a gasp for breath seemed to confirm the piteous statement.

Cora hastened to obey.

The bag was another proof of the rank and position of the owner, for not only was it of a most expensive kind but there was a coronet stamped on the plate, and C.M. on it as initials below.

It did not affect the girl's anxiety for her patient however either for interest or reverence, since it was only as a sufferer, not an individual, that she considered her claims on attention.

The silver-topped bottle was indicated and unstoped, the wine poured out and administered, and the faint colour returned to the patient's cheeks and lips.

"You are better," said the girl, "you will not be afraid now."

But a lurch of the heaving vessel brought another cry to the lady's lips.

"Oh, mercy, mercy, we shall be lost—lost!" she said. "Why did I come? why did he send for me—home?"

Cora's anxiety was perhaps slightly excited even in that urgent crisis. But she had enough to do in striving to calm the terror not only of her self-imposed charge but of others in the cabin who were in frantic apprehensions of the result.

Still the girl kept close to that interesting woman who had so powerfully attracted her notice.

The thin hand grasped hers convulsively as the motion of the vessel kept increasing her fear.

"Do not leave me; I shall die if you do," she gasped, sadly. "I was never in such a storm before—and—I am so terrified."

"I will not leave you, but there is no danger, indeed there is not; it is only a very fresh adverse wind," said Cora, encouragingly.

"Are not you afraid?" asked the lady.

"No, certainly not," was the reply.

"Nor ill?"

"Nor ill; I have no fear of either; it would not be of any moment if I were to be in any danger, so I suppose that is one reason why I am less alarmed," said the girl, trying to divert her companion's ideas by alluding to other topics.

"You have no guardian, no friend to mourn you," returned the lady, the device seeming partly to succeed.

"It is true," answered Cora, quietly.

"And yet you are so beautiful and so young and I am sure well born," observed the invalid.

"I am young, but I have lost every tie to the world," replied the girl, evasively. "And it is a pleasure even to be useful to a stranger," she went on, with a gentle smile.

The lady examined her with even more interest, though at the moment a stronger lurch of the unfortunate vessel prevented its utterance, and she grasped Cora and clung to her as if for life itself.

And the girl half involuntarily held her in her arms and soothed her tears, and pillow'd her head on her bosom, almost forgetting in the excitement of the moment and the fascination of that pale, sweet face and the large, dark, soft eyes that the creature she thus caressed and pitied had been unknown to her some few hours before.

"You will not leave me, you will go with me, if we ever reach the land safely?" said the lady, after a brief lull of the tempest. "I have no confidence in my maid now that she has deserted me so cruelly. And the courier whom I am bringing with me to England is quite ignorant of the language."

"But I do not even know you. I am quite in ignorance as to whom I am speaking," said Cora, doubtfully.

The lady smiled sadly.

"Ah, I have forgotten that you are a stranger. I have been so long accustomed to living where I was known by every one with whom I came in contact in the secluded spot where I have been staying for the last few years. And now I am returning to England well nigh to die," she went on, "only that it is my duty to the son I have deserted too long."

Cora waited eagerly for the next words, but again the invalid seemed to sink into the hopeless half-alarm, half-languor that had distinguished her whole demeanour.

"And that son?" the girl at length ventured to suggest, "who is he?"

The lady started.

"Have I not told you?" she said. "It is the young and ill-fated Earl of Belfort. Have you heard of him and his misfortunes?" she added, evidently struck by Cora's irrepressible look of astonishment and incredulity at the words.

"Yes, a little," was the reply. "At least, it is well known that—I mean the circumstances of the misfortunes were too public not to be remembered. But I thought, I understood that his mother was dead?" she added, unable altogether to repress the anxious question where Ernest was concerned.

The lady gave a wan smile.

"It was a mistake," she said, "though a natural one. My health had been terribly shattered long before my husband's death, and when I found that I was actually useless in the matter of my son's education I determined to take refuge in the balmy climate of Egypt, and to relinquish all connection with the outer world. That is the secret of the report which you heard. But," she added, "it is no time to speak of such matters, and I am inclined rather to rest than to talk now. Thank Heaven, the wind is quiet at last."

And she sank back on the cushions and closed her eyes in the welcome exhaustion of slumber.

Cora sat and watched her with a thoughtful doubt as to her own proper course.

She had now at least an opportunity of conveying to Lord Belfort the message of peace with which she was charged.

Yet how could she tell the mother of the fugitive that she had known so intimately her abused son, and that she had been the actual cause of his danger and his crime, if crime it was to be called? It seemed impossible that she should thus brand herself as it were with a lasting stamp of shame, which no one save those who comprehended the whole tangled past could appreciate as it deserved?

Yet was she to permit Ernest to pass a life in exile and tears because she shrank from her own personal risk?

Such questions passed rapidly through the orphan's mind as she crouched on that cabin floor, and watched the pale sleeper, and many and varied were the plans she formed and the prayers she offered up for guidance in her perplexity.

But the minutes passed rapidly with her, and still her resolution remained unformed; then she heard the mariners' cry on casting anchor, and she knew by the voices of the custom-house officers coming on deck, and the bustle of the whole crew, that they were in England, the land which had been a step-mother to her, the land where she was not sure that she could claim kindred and home.

She was in a manner forced to take her resolution thus far, that she must devote herself to the poor, helpless one, who in spite of her rank and station seemed thus cast on a feeble girl for support and guidance.

It was surely Providence that had thus brought her in contact with Ernest Belfort's mother. And that guidance she was bound in any case to obey, at any cost to herself.

Cora was perhaps not well versed in the laws of human nature, but the instinct of her own true heart led her to the very magnet which should be her lodestone, and, whatever might betide, she would go on in that narrow and difficult path.

* * * * *

The weary bustle was over.

Lady Belfort, since such was the name by which she could doubtless claim her place in the respect and estimation of the world, had established herself for the nonce in a comfortable hotel in the cheery town of Folkestone.

Cora was with her, albeit she had asserted more than once her independence of any tie that should bind her to the service of her new friend. And at last the dowager countess had in a measure overcome her fatigue, and was fully equal to the adverse contingencies that might befall her in the new life to which she had so lately returned.

She was attired in a dress that if still totally different to the fashions of the day was yet thoroughly rich in quality, and for her own especial use perhaps more fascinating than any toilet: that London's most fashionable modiste could produce, and as she reclined on a large crimson couch that displayed to the very full her graceful form and delicate face Cora fancied that she could detect a likeness between her and Ernest's well-known features, and that she could have eagerly and thankfully cast herself on her maternal kindness were she in a position to claim such a blessing for her lone and desolate self.

Lady Belfort's eyes were fixed on her with a somewhat inquiring and suspicious gaze.

"Cora—since that is your name," she began, "if I remember right what happened on that memorable ship, you gave me to understand that you had some knowledge of my poor son and his errors and dangers. Tell me frankly the simple truth, even as I have been accustomed to hear it among the simple children of nature where I have lived. Did you know him—Ernest? I mean what were the links that bound you to him so as to betray such surprise and emotion at the news I was his mother and about to seek him and learn the whole truth concerning him?"

Cora's lovely face did not flame scarlet as it once might have done at the words. Her feelings were too deep—the whole issue at stake was too momentous for her to yield to personal emotions, and she only paused in her reply lest an idle or thoughtless word might have too hastily compromised the man who had by slow and strange degrees won upon her heart. At length she replied, in a subdued, deliberate tone:

"Lady Belfort, you may perhaps blame and despise me for what I have to say, but it matters not if I can accomplish what is the only remaining task I have to fulfil. You can little imagine that I have more real knowledge of Lord Belfort's misfortunes and all connected with them than perhaps any one on earth. It was for an unfortunate mistake and quarrel, in which I had, alas! an innocent share, that he incurred the danger he has only now escaped," she added, with clasped hands and earnest voice. "And it was providential that I was permitted to be the means

of his escape from immediate danger, which is now passed, I trust, for ever!"

Lady Belfort started up from her pillows in ungovernable surprise.

"You!" she said, "you! then the report was true that reached me, and it was an affair of jealousy and undisciplined love that brought poor, ill-guided Ernest his fate!"

Cora drew her proud head unconsciously to its full height.

"It is not for me to speak where I am, I confess, too intimately concerned, madam," she said, calmly, "but Lord Belfort will give his own true account of that unfortunate affair. All I can say is that I am even now in anxious desire to discover him, and deliver the message with which I am charged, and which will I hope release him from every farther anxiety and fear."

"And you, who are you? At least I, as his mother, have a right to learn that much," pursued the dowager countess, with a sort of mingled admiration and annoyance in her manner.

Cora was silent for a few moments.

"I do not know you," she said, at length. "How am I to trust you with the most cherished secrets of my heart? You may serve or betray me where it is of the greatest importance to preserve my confidence inviolate."

"What surely do you need, what should you wish or expect to know about me?" asked the countess. "It is enough that I am a lady, both by descent and a long life that has never been inconsistent with my birth. Child, I never yet stained my lips with a falsehood, and the tribes among whom I have lived have rather strengthened the holy horror of base deception that I have entertained since my very birth. If I give you my word that anything you tell me is sacred it is even as a bond which can never be broken save by your own consent."

Cora could well respond to such sentiments when her own nature so entirely accorded with the honour and purity of the creed. And there was an earnest softness in the lady's whole look and mien that won her more than she could scarcely have believed herself susceptible from a stranger.

"It is but of little moment," she exclaimed, at last, with some impatience in her tone that was rather a self-contempt than any other feeling. "It is foolish of me to shrink from any other risks when I have nothing to hope for and so little to fear. Yes, lady," she added, with a sudden impulse, casting herself on her knees at the side of Lady Belfort's couch, "it is hard, very hard to find oneself despised and misunderstood by the pure and the noble of one's own sex, and to see that there is an actual repulsion between them and oneself. Still it is right, it is necessary for the sake of more precious lives, for innocence and justice, that you should know all, and I will tell you everything so far as is necessary that you should hear."

And with rapid tongue and well-chosen words that came from the very bottom of the heart, Cora poured out the whole miserable tale of her sufferings and the events of the last months, that at once proved so arduously her own courage and the devotion which had been displayed to herself.

Lady Belfort listened eagerly.

She had been too long freed from the usual ideas and restraints of conventional life not to appreciate more than might be usual with her rank and sex and the bearings of so remarkable a tale.

She read aright those beautiful deep eyes with their unflinching candour, the proud curl of the lip, the flushing and paling of the cheeks that had yet no guilt nor shame in the varying hue.

"And you saved him then, you saved my son?" she asked, quietly, when the voice had ceased.

"I was able to prevent the immediate danger in which he stood," was the calm reply.

"And left him only when he was placed under more effective guardianship?" returned the countess.

Cora bowed her head in assent.

Again there was silence for some time, though the throbbing of the hearts of both the speakers betrayed more strongly than words the feverish agitation they suffered.

Cora almost started when Lady Belfort's voice again sounded on the still atmosphere.

"Cora, I wish to believe you as implicitly as I wish to believe myself," she said; "but I would demand of Ernest's mother a candid reply to one question that I am going to put to you, and I shall be able pretty well to guess from that what credit I can give to your account. Was it from love to my son that you did all this heroic deed?—were you flattered and exalted by the idea that you were the cause of the quarrel and its fatal result?"

A thousand shames, perhaps an indignant resentment that was hardly reconcilable with the circumstances of the case blazed up in Cora's fair face.

"No," she said, firmly, though there was a choking

tremour in her voice that she could with great difficulty control. "No, Lady Belfort, it was not from any such feeling, nor the very ghost of its existence that I did a simple duty."

"Oh, then it is so still, you are taking all these pains and betraying all this interest on that account? You have no idea of tenderer interest in Ernest's welfare?" returned the countess, with some sarcasm in her tones.

Cora's head fell—she could not meet the searching eyes of the mother of him she loved, whom she knew was more dear to her than any human being; her fortitude gave way at length, her lips quivered like a child's, and she burst into a passionate flood of tears.

(To be continued.)

WHO IS HE?

By the Author of "Lord Dane's Error," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE laird started. A strange, awesome look grew in his withered old face as he gazed. He was like one under a spell. The tears began to drip down his shrunken cheeks. He laid his hand upon the young man's curling hair.

"When I was young," he said, tremulously, "I loved a girl called Lettice Rolf—she married my dearest friend. His name was Champion. It was the Champion look took me in Dick Crawley's face, but here I see my lost Lettice too. You are the son of my lost Lettice, and I was near dooming you to an awful death. Heaven forgive me."

He laid his clasped hands on the curls of young Ruble with a murmured blessing.

The young man did not contradict him. Strange, awful, and perplexing thoughts were stirring in his knightly soul. If everybody who saw his face for the first time persisted in calling it a Champion's what was he to think? Did it not go far to prove that Lord Champion's wild fancies concerning him were truth after all?

The laird's servants, at his command and countenance, gathered round the young man, and while part attended the laird the rest escorted him within the castle, where he was shown to one of the most splendid rooms, and had a change of elegant garments brought him in place of his own dusty apparel until his portmanteau and trunks could be sent for. The laird's own valet assisted him in his toilet, and then he went to a banquet in the great, superb dining-hall of Brenlau, such as he had rarely seen. The table was spread with the most wonderful service of gold and silver and flashing crystal; the covers when they were lifted showed such epicurean and delicious meats and other exquisitely prepared dishes as only a true gourmet could have provided or appreciated.

The Laird of Brenlau was a very high liver, rich as a Cresus, and self-indulgent though so unselfish.

He made his appearance dressed in a wonderful suit of silk and velvet, with a shirt of the finest cambric and real lace ruffles, a diamond in his bosom front, powder on his hair, and his hands jewelled like a woman's. The buckles on his shoes flashed with gems also, and though he had his staff still and was partially supported by an attendant he moved with a pompous step and manner that accorded well with his glittering and rich, old-fashioned attire.

Under all this pomp and gorgeousness Verner Ruble found a warm and tender heart throbbing, and as the wine warmed the old man's veins his wit sparkled, and graceful words flowing from his loosened tongue presented as in a vision to his fascinated guest that past in which blooming, beautiful, sweet Lettice Rolf had been the star of his worship, the adored ideal of his romantic soul.

Upon this little finger of his left hand Verner Ruble wore a ring set with sapphires all the way round, a quaint, pretty jewel, which his uncle, the count, had given him, with mysterious charges as to its safe keeping, but a few weeks before.

Upon this ring the dim eyes of the Laird of Brenlau suddenly fastened in a sort of stupefaction.

He extended his shaking hand for it, and Verner Ruble kindly removed it from his finger and laid it in his palm.

For some moments the laird could not see the ring for his fast-coming tears. But all the while he was turning the pretty jewelled circlet in his fingers, and talking softly to himself. Presently he wiped his eyes, and counting the stones from the largest pressed one. Three of the stones flew back and showed engraved on an inner plate the words "Robin to Lettice."

The laird caught his breath with a choking sob. Then he straightened himself.

"We were to have been married," he said, "and then she saw your father, lad, and loved him, and, seeing that, I gave her off. Robin Coursie o' Brenlau was never the man to take any woman to wife

unwilling. She never asked me, and she grieved a deal lest I blamed her for loving another than me. Then I gave her this ring in token that I forgave her freely, and had not a hard thought against her."

Verner Ruble had not spoken a word. He was struck dumb as it were at the production of this new witness to the truth of Lord Champion's theory concerning himself, for if this ring was his mother's how came Count Ruble by it? He must have taken it from himself—he might have done so if Lord Champion was right.

He sat shading his face with his hand lest the laird should see how convulsed it was with emotion.

But the laird did see, and his heart warmed more than ever toward him whom he supposed to be the son of the only woman he had ever loved.

The Laird of Brenlau and Verner Ruble were not long in making friends, as has been seen.

The kind, soft-hearted old man was as romantic and sentimental as any novel-reading girl. He was genial also; and what is called for lack of a better name—magnetic.

The two talked more like girls than men. Verner Ruble had told his whole singular and touching story so far as he knew it before they left the stately old dining-room, and the laird had listened with widening eyes and a growing flush and flush, that showed how deeply he was interested.

They resumed their confidences after they had adjourned to the drawing-room, a luxurious and elegant apartment, in which—for here the air was chill enough to make it desirable—a fire had been lighted on the broad, marble hearth.

"I am with Lord Champion," the laird said, with solemnity. "That you are a Champion I should think no one could doubt who has seen you. It only remains to prove it, and, if he would, that old fellow you call the count could help you do that."

Young Ruble sat breathing heavily. A mist seemed on his brain, a weight on his soul. It was impossible that he could be a Champion—more impossible that he was that lost Maurice Champion of whom his lordship had told him so much.

Yet with all his passionate, fervid soul he loved Lady Isabel, and these fancies of the Laird of Brenlau and Lord Champion seemed to him only the more dreadful mockery because of his worship of that queenly woman and wife.

"Why impossible?" reasoned the laird; "you say and Count Ruble, your uncle, himself says, that you had a fever which seemed to destroy your memory of the past. How can you guess even at what that past held? As well have held Isabel as nothing. Besides does not this queen of beautiful women claim you as her own? Has she not always refused that other who claims her, and who I am very sure from your description is that very Dick Crawley who tried to murder me?"

"I believe you are right there. I am sure the man who passes for Lady Isabel's husband is entirely unworthy of her. I hate him."

Verner Ruble clenched his white teeth in a strange passion as he spoke.

The old laird laughed aloud at this exhibition.

"What do my lady's friends generally say to this fellow whom she herself disowns so persistently?" he asked.

"They are ready to swear to him, so far as I know, with the one exception of Lord Champion. Sir Robert Calthorpe and his wife—an uncle and an aunt of Lady Isabel's—are his dearest friends."

"Humph! My dear boy, go on; you are fishing link after link in the chain of evidence. At the time of Lady Isabel's marriage to Maurice Champion Sir Robert and he were not friends to my certain knowledge. I have heard Sir Robert himself express the most intense dislike for Maurice Champion. Stop, now I remember. Lady Isabel at the very time of her husband's mysterious disappearance went so far as to charge her uncle with being at the bottom of his absence. I got an idea at the time that she accused him of having caused his death. Lady Calthorpe is the next heir, you know, after Lady Isabel and her heirs."

"There is motive enough, if the man is wicked and unprincipled, and I never liked him, but I never could believe that he had done so badly as Lady Isabel imagined."

"You know Sir Robert Calthorpe?" exclaimed Verner Ruble, in some astonishment.

"Perfectly. Until he married Lady Calthorpe he was a poor man. That is, his father left him some money. But he wasted it in foreign travel and silly, expensive experiments in chemistry. After his return from abroad, a poor man, he lived for a year or more at an old, tumble-down place of his not far from Brenlau. You can see the chimney from my wall, and very plainly on a fair day."

Verner Ruble mused a moment.

"That woman who claimed me for her grandson, down in the village, you remember her?"

The laird nodded.

"She is Dick Crawley's grandmother. Yes, I remember."

"When I asked her who she took me for she answered very queerly that I was Dick Crawley, the son of her son and the daughter of the actress lady—she who is now called Lady Calthorpe."

The laird started—his old eyes flashed again with shrewd intelligence.

"I begin to see," he said, slowly. "The father of the late Lord Champion, Lady Isabel's grandfather, married for his second wife an actress. Lady Calthorpe was the daughter of this actress. I remember now that there were curious whispers regarding her at one time, and, though every one here knew who was Dick's father—he was killed at a horse race—no one ever guessed who his mother was. Could there have been a secret marriage between Crawley the elder and her who is now Lady Calthorpe? I begin to believe it. Crawley was good-looking, had rather good manners, and a foreign air—he was French on one side. He used to call himself Count Crawley, and actually passed himself off as in good earnest sometimes. And that's where Dick Crawley got his Champion looks," the laird concluded, triumphantly; "and that is how they came to take him to humbug Lady Isabel with. But it was a daring game—a daring game. Pity it is my lady had no children, they would not have gone so far, I fancy, then."

Verner Ruble started.

"There is a child—a beautiful little boy—or there was," and he dropped his voice; "Heaven alone knows whether he is still living. My lady maintains that he is. The child was stolen from her at Dorset the same night that her waiting-woman was murdered. You must have heard of that."

"I did—I did, but the matter passed from my mind. We remember best what we have known in youth. I had forgotten that unhappy affair, though so recent."

"My chief errand into this part of the country now is to look for that lost child. I have little hope, but I shall try. What is that?"

Verner Ruble started up suddenly, pointing through one of the tall windows, before which the curtains had not been dropped.

A curious, red glow was in the sky in that direction.

The old Laird of Brenlau looked.

"It must be Calthorpe Towers," he said, in a moment. "That is the place I was speaking to you of—the dismal, tumble-down old concern—not even a picturesquely rain. How could it take fire? No one lives there. Stay—I think I heard Allen say there was an old woman living there."

The old man turned and rang his bell sharply. It was instantly answered. He questioned the man rapidly.

"Yes, sir," he said; "there is an old woman living there. She's sister to old Dame Crawley. Like enough she's fallen asleep over her pipe, and set fire to it herself."

"Take horse and ride there like the wind!" cried the old laird, in sudden excitement. "She may be roasting now! Heaven, I wish I could go!"

The man had already disappeared. The laird tottered as he sauk into a chair, Verner Ruble supporting him to it.

"I will go in your place, if you will permit me," said Verner Ruble, in some excitement.

"Go then!" gasped the laird.

The young man was gone before he could say the words.

He overtook Allen at the stables, and saddled his own horse in wild haste.

Three or four of the servants followed pell-mell. The troop tore away heading toward Calthorpe Towers.

So fast they rode that they were near riding down an old woman who came fleeing from the direction of the Towers, with her gray hair streaming, and her garments fluttering, while at every step she shrieked as though a legion of demons were after her.

They were in full sight of the blazing pile now, and stopped while Allen Banc questioned the woman.

She ceased her cries at first, but, happening to cast her eyes upon Verner Ruble, she began to shriek again, to tear her hair and beat her breast, in an altogether frantic manner.

"What's the matter, dame? You're not hurt?" demanded Allen, impatiently; "how did you manage to set fire to it? Anybody else up there?"

The woman did not stop screaming till he put the last question, when she suddenly became quiet, and stood shaking in every limb, her old teeth chattering and her eyes looking ready to drop out of her head with fright. Her skinny cheeks grew livid, her lips were a pale white like the lips of a corpse. Allen and the others could stare at her as the light of the blazing Towers showed them how unearthly she looked.

"I believe some one is up there being burned to

death!" Allen cried. "You've always had an evil name, you fiend; what have you been up to now?"

The woman darted a horrible glance at Verner Ruble, whom she took for her employer, Dick Cawley. But she did not speak a word. She tried, but her tongue seemed glued to the roof of her mouth.

"Will you speak?" shouted Allen Bane, suddenly leaping from his horse and shaking her roughly by the shoulders; "if you don't tell me the truth in two minutes I'll carry you to the top of the hill and fling you back into the fire."

The woman shrieked again in mortal fear. Then she began to whine in a horrible manner.

"I'll tell you, only let me go," she said; "it is only a lad, good Mister Bane, a little lad I was keeping for Sir Robert and him"—mentioning to young Ruble—"I'd a got him out if I could. I—"

There was a cry of horror.

Like an electric flash the truth came to Verner Ruble.

"It is Lady Isabel's child," he groaned, and plunged forward up the hill, the others after him almost instantly.

It was a grand and awful sight.

Calthorpe Towers, though not covering a large area of ground, were built high. Partially crumbled though those once lofty walls were now, there was here and there a casement left, through which the flames shot forked tongues. The wood-work inside had originally been of a very heavy, substantial make. It burned now after so long like tinder. Already the fire had made such progress as to cause the decaying walls to begin to tumble inward, and as they did so vast clouds of smoke and ashes mingled with cinders rose and fell in a shower of sparks about the troop from Brenlau.

Allen Bane rode up beside Verner Ruble as he was rapidly circling the burning Towers.

"If there was any living thing inside there," he said, "he is dead before now."

An appalling cry from young Ruble checked him. He pointed to the topmost tower of all, round whose flat top a stout stone balustrade ran.

"He is there; I saw his little face above the wall just now," Ruble said, in a strange, hoarse voice.

The next moment Allen Bane saw him also, the childlike, sweet little face spirited in the midst of its terror, shown a moment above the parapet and vanished. They thought they heard him scream, but the roar and crackle of the flames made it difficult to tell that.

"Oh, Heaven," cried Allen Bane, "there is not a chance for him."

"There is, there shall be," muttered Verner Ruble. Spurring his horse close to the outer wall, Verner Ruble leaped upon it and ran swiftly round, though the flames scorched him as he looked in vain for some point at which he might enter without being consumed at the outset. But even his determined frenzy was forced back by the fury of the flames. He would have been dead in one moment if he had dared the awful blaze. He must have breathed fire before he could have advanced ten steps. He ran back, fairly glaring about him for some means of rescue.

Suddenly Allen called out, sharply.

"There is the King Beech, sir," he said, "mightn't he be reached from that?"

Verner Ruble uttered an exclamation in his turn as his eye fell on the tall giant to which Allen Bane was pointing.

There had long ago been a grand entrance to the Towers on this side—an avenue marshalled on either hand by immense beech trees, once the pride of the country from their age and size. These had gradually disappeared till but three remained, and of these the one nearest the house was fortunately the tallest and leaned toward it. It did not look as if it was an impossible task to reach the child, once in the midst of that tossing, fast-blackening crown of leaves.

But how to get there? The huge trunk, too large to clasp, offered no support for feet or hands. Not even a sailor could have scaled that lofty, bare height.

Meanwhile the fire raged and the boy, driven by the heat from within, had climbed out upon the stone balustrade as far as he could.

The little fellow bore himself with wonderful bravery. He seemed to comprehend the situation, to understand that they would save him if they could, but that he was beyond their reach.

His boyish, piping voice kept rising above the roar and crackle of the flames:

"B'd mamma good-bye for me," he called often; "if the fire burns me up, bid mamma good-bye for me. My name is Hugh Champion, and my mamma is Lady Isabel Champion, and tell her it was the man who makes me call him papa that brought me here."

Verner Ruble was ghastly with horror and agony. But for Allen and the others he would have made the mad attempt to force his way through the flames to the child. These held him back by main force.

Presently the child called again:

"Tell mamma I didn't cry," he said; but the little voice broke in a wild wail at the last: "It is so hot, the fire burns me so. Oh, can't you think of some way?"

Verner Ruble gnashed his strong white teeth. He cried aloud in his agony, and wrestled fearfully with those who held him.

"Let me go! let me die with him! She will hear that I died with him if I could not save him."

The weeping of the boy could now be plainly heard. They could hear him uttering little prayers that his mother had taught him or moaning:

"Mamma, mamma."

All the time he was crowded by the flames more and more over the edge of the stone balustrade, till he seemed to incline beyond it as he crouched.

Suddenly Verner Ruble uttered a shout:

"I have it," he cried, "obey me and we'll save him yet."

Allen Bane and the others stared, but they did as he bade them.

First he placed them all in a group under the great beech tree, and in a few rapid words named to them his plan—a desperate one indeed, but they all knew it was the only chance left.

Not a word was uttered but every man steadied his lips as he took position, and not a heart there but to its owner beat louder than the roar of the flames.

Young Ruble stepped out where the boy could plainly see him, and shouted to him in a clear, strong voice, that mounted above all other sounds, like a bugle call above the din of battle.

The men below thrilled, the boy stopped his moans of despair and anguish.

"Hugh, Hugh Champion!" called Ruble, in his clarion voice, "if you are a brave boy, we will save you yet. Are you brave enough to do anything I bid you now?"

"Yes, anything," wailed the child.

"Listen then. There is no time to lose, any moment the wall may tumble under you and drop you in the flames. Creep back to the other corner of the balustrade opposite the tree. The fire will not scorched you so much if you keep close to the wall. When you are nearest the tree, stand up suddenly and jump. Jump far out into the tree if possible. If that don't catch you we will. Now then don't stop to think or look. Aim for the tree and remember your mamma."

There was dead silence except the awful voice of the fire. Evidently the boy hesitated and shrank before the peril of that leap into mid air, as well he might.

Ruble himself was whiter than snow, but his dark blue eyes flashed, and his voice never faltered in its compelling yet tender sternness.

"Now then, my boy, I shall count three. Are you ready? When I say two, stand up, at three jump for your life. One, two, three!"

The child half-rose and sank back with a shriek. They thought he had fallen into the flames. But the next instant his shrill, scared voice called him to count it once more.

The men caught their breath. Ruble shut his teeth hard, uttering the count through them—one, two three.

The boy himself screamed out the last count, and with the word shot like a bird straight out from the tower.

There was an instant of horrible suspense. He struck the tree, caught at the boughs with both little hands, missed them, and fell crashing through from limb to limb, now hanging a moment by his clothes, then falling again, while the very breath of those below seemed to stop.

Their arms, outstretched before to receive him, remained so mechanically. They were paralyzed for the moment. Ruble alone retained his self-possession. It was his arms that received the brave child at last.

The shock hurled him to the ground, but the others were lifting him almost as he touched it. At the same moment the last tower, as if it had only waited for the child to be gone, fell with a crash! Not one of those stout men knew it. They were crying like women over the boy.

Verner Ruble hugged him close, and kissed him passionately. The boy lay utterly quiet in his arms, his large, innocent, loving eyes going slowly and gratefully from face to face. Suddenly that tender gaze faded, the silken lashes dropped—he was still.

"He is dead!" cried Verner Ruble, in agony.

"He has fainted, and no wonder," said Allen Bane; "his arm is broken, see," and he lifted it up.

Ruble shuddered, and one of the men, muttering

"Little saint," ran for water.

He found some near, and they bathed the little, thin, wan face with it. But consciousness was long in returning to the long-tried child.

They found old boughs enough to make a sort of litter, on which they spread their coats and then laid him upon it. Then two of them lifted him gently and moved as swiftly and easily as they could toward Brenlau.

A third mounted his horse and rode to the village for a surgeon.

The excitement at Brenlau upon their arrival was intense.

The boy's romantic and sorrowful story was repeated with numerous exaggerations and additions—none worse, however, than the pitiful truth, which was plainly enough revealed in the pinched, thin little face, his shrunken limbs, and neglected person. The petted darling of a worshipping mother, nursed in luxury, he had been forced to sleep on bare stones, and nearly starved.

The wonder was that he was alive after it all.

As Verner Ruble lifted him tenderly from the litter at Brenlau he smiled faintly in spite of the pain.

"I love you," he said, and moved his pretty lips for a kiss.

Ruble kissed him fondly, his own lips quivering, and tears in his eyes.

The child watched him gravely yet lovingly.

"It makes me think of mamma to have you kiss me," he said. "It's a great while since mamma kissed me, and you don't know how I have wanted her."

"You sweet, sweet child," Verner murmured, in a voice half-rapture, half-awe.

When the surgeon came it was Verner Ruble who held the patient and heroic boy while his arm was set. Afterward he also stayed with him. He could scarcely be brought to leave his side for a moment.

The Laird of Brenlau looked on with a curious, exultant look growing in his old eyes.

"He never seems to suspect," he muttered to himself, with a queer chuckle. "Come, come away, man, and leave him to the nurse. She knows better than you a thousand times," he urged.

Verner Ruble smiled. That smile seemed to flood his beautiful face with light.

"Let the nurse stay too if she likes. I shall not go. I was never so happy in my life as I am here by this boy, and he likes me here. Here I shall stay. He is the picture of his mother, laird, don't you think so?"

"Is he?" murmured the old man, thoughtfully, as he leaned upon his staff and looked upon the child, now sleeping soundly, and then to Ruble's soul-like face. "He looks as much like you."

"Like me?"

Verner Ruble looked at the laird in mingled strangeness and emotion.

"Like you," repeated the old man, solemnly. "Are you blind, are you deaf to the voice of your own heart? Whence this yearning affection for this sweet boy if it is not the voice of nature insisting on being heard? Tut, tut, man. Before Heaven I believe this is your son as much as hers!"

Verner Ruble sank back in his chair like one dead, except that he breathed. His ghastly face, his white lips, his shut eyes, scared the laird at first, but he soon saw that it was only excessive agitation, and after a moment he quitted the room.

"Let him think of it," he muttered to himself, as he tottered slowly away. "Let him sit and look at that sleeping boy, and think of my words."

Verner Ruble suppressed a groan as he watched his friend depart.

"Oh, Heaven!" he murmured, as so many times before. * * * * *

Lord Champion sat in his own private sitting-room the morning after the departure of Verner Ruble. He had just finished his breakfast, and was in his dressing-gown and slippers, lazily conning over the morning paper, pretending to read, when in reality his thoughts were far away, following young Ruble in his amateur detective trip to Dorset.

"Odd coincidence," he said to himself, "if he does turn out to be the boy's father! I wonder what my lady would say if she knew where he is gone?"

That moment the door of his lordship's private sitting-room opened noiselessly and shut again. The last person in the world he expected to see just then, though he was thinking of her, stood before him—Lady Isabel herself. Her large black eyes were burning, her lips scarlet and palpitating with excitement.

With a warning gesture to him she turned and locked the door behind her, Lord Champion staring as if he suspected her of being out of her mind. Advancing closely to him, she said, in a low voice:

"I thought I should find you here," and threw back the hood of the dark, long, shrouding cloak she wore. "No one knows I have come," she went on, "not even my maid, who locks me into my apartments every night, and is in reality my janitress. Hush!" as he would have interrupted her, excitedly—"I

know all you would say. It is of no use; nothing can be done for me—I don't want anything done!" she added, with bitter passion—"only my boy must live to thwart them of the wealth they covet, and I have found out where, or nearly where he is. You, Lord Champion, must find and save him. My jani-tress has one weakness, of which her cruel employers must be ignorant, for she is very cunning; but I have found her out. She takes opium. Watching my chance, I have several times obtained the key to my chambers and stolen forth when no one knew it. Of course I am only locked in at night when she wishes to sleep; the rest of the time I am watched by her, by Sir Robert or Lady Cattie, or—the other. The three meet sometimes for a conference in Lady Cal-thorpe's rooms, and I have been so fortunate as to be twice within hearing without their suspecting it. You know there is a secret door from her dressing-room, similar to the one in the apartments I occupied at the time I went to Dorset. She does not know it. Every night, when I could safely, I have gone to this door and listened, hoping I should learn something of my boy. It was thus I got the first satisfactory hint that he was alive. Last night I heard him alluded to in language too plain to be misunderstood. Do not interrupt me, my lord, for my time is very short."

My lady drew her breath in sharply as she spoke. Her beautiful eyes grew almost fierce in their glow.

"I heard Sir Robert say these words to his tool, the prize-fighter as you call him: 'That old dame of yours up in Brelau is to be depended upon, I suppose?' he said, 'but she is very slow.'

"The tool answered him with something like a growl:

"It was your own order, Sir Robert, that no violence should be used."

"True," Sir Robert answered, "but it ought to have been easy enough worrying a child like that out of the world before this without violence."

Lady Isabel paused, her lovely face white and convulsed with emotion, though she had not shed a tear. Catching Lord Champion's hands between her own, she pressed her lips wildly upon them.

"My lord, save my child; I know that I am doomed, I feel that my enemies will conquer me. They have lain in wait for my life long, and sooner or later, when they think they dare with safety to themselves, they will put an end to my days. Let them. I do not care to live. But my boy, my sweet, high-spirited, manly child—he must live to thwart them. Heaven protect his tender helplessness, wherever he is now. Save him, my lord, and I could almost come out of my grave to bless and thank you."

"Isabel, if a hair of your head suffers they shall pay for it," Lord Champion sternly said; "do not fear. They dare not harm you."

"My lord," she said, "you little know them if you think so. I am as sure of death at their hands as if I lay already in my coffin, and when all is done you will be able to prove nothing. Is not that man decided by the law to be my lawful husband? Has he not put on an outside of devotion to me calculated to blind all eyes? Who would believe that so fond a husband could have any interest in procuring the death of the wife with whom his income dies?"

A terrible, satirical smile curved my lady's beautiful lips. Then her head dropped upon her white clasped hands, and she sobbed in hysterical excitement.

Lord Champion caressed her slight, cold fingers softly.

"Isabel," he said, "come back here with me. My sister is absent just now, but she will fly to me the instant I summon her. They are killing you by inches now. Come here, or let me hide you somewhere six months, and I believe in that time I can uproot the whole diabolical concern."

My lady shook her head.

"They would hunt me down wherever I went and drag me back to a worse jailership than now. Beside, they have my child hid away somewhere; and till he is safe I cannot go from where I may get a clue now and then to his whereabouts or safety. Find and rescue my child from them, my lord. Oh, dear Lord Champion, save my boy, and they may do as they will with me."

"Isabel," said Lord Champion, holding her hands tightly and speaking low, "can you bear a piece of startling information?"

"I can bear anything save to hear that they have already killed him," she said, with white lips.

"Can you bear to hear that he has gone now to Brelau in search of the boy?"

"Not my husband?"

(To be continued.)

GOLD AND SILVER FISH.—Gold and silver fish need a constant supply of oxygen gas, which is produced by certain aquatic plants. If kept in a globe, the water should be changed constantly to renew the

supply. If in a tank supplied with a growing waterweed of the proper kind, this is better avoided. The best specimen is *vallianeria*, which should be planted in a small saucer containing sand and a little mould, and then buried in the shingle at the bottom of the tank. Care should be taken not to overcrowd the vessel, and it is most essential to keep a few water snails and mussels to act as scavengers. Under these conditions fish will live for months without the water being changed, but a small piece of sponge fastened on a cane may be used to clean the sides. Vermicelli broken into minute fragments, which have been previously soaked in warm water, may be given, but bread should be avoided. The fish, however, feed on the animalcula contained in the water, which should not be filtered, and on others which are bred in the weed. Care should be taken on purchasing to avoid warm water fish, as they invariably turn black and subsequently die.

EDITH LYLE'S SECRET.

By the Author of "Daisy Thornton," etc., etc.

CHAPTER LX.

THE wedding took place early in October, and from my chamber-window I saw the bridal-train go by, and heard the pealing of the merry marriage-bells, and the shouting of the children from the school, who strewed the bride's path from the carriage to the church with flowers, and Godfrey promised them a fete upon the lawn when he returned from his journey.

I was up at Schuyler House many days while the preparations for the wedding were progressing, and saw the bridal-dresses as they came from London, and were tried on by Gertie and approved by Godfrey, who thought each one prettier than the last. But then Godfrey would have said a corn-bag was becoming if worn by Gertie. I never saw a boy so happy or so madly in love as he was those days when he kept the house constantly stirred up with his jokes and fun.

Miss Rosseter was there, looking younger and handsomer than I had ever seen her look; and what was stranger than all, she had left her medicine-chest in London, and only indulged occasionally in her favourite morphine when the excitement was too much for her. It was known that she intended to make Gertie her heiress, and it was curious to see the interest she manifested in the young girl, seeming even jealous of Edith herself, and vying with her in petting and spoiling the bride-elect, if the latter had been possible.

My old enemy attacked me just in time to keep me from the wedding, which every one was free to attend. Never before, nor since, was the church so full as it was that lovely October morning, when the maples were turning scarlet, and the walnut-trees were golden in the autumnal sunshine, which fell so softly and warmly, as if in blessing, on the beautiful young bride and the perfectly happy bridegroom.

One day, early in November, after the honeymoon trip, the happy pair came back to Schuyler Hill, where the bells rang merrily in honour of their return, and the boys, remembering the promised fete, made a bonfire and hurrahed lustily for Mr. Godfrey Schuyler.

They had their fete, but not until after the grand party at Schuyler House, which, for elegance and expenditure, far outdid the one given a few years before, when Edith was the bride and Gertie the Little unknown girl, sitting curled up in the chair, watching the ladies as they came, and wishing so much that she was one of them.

She was one of them now or rather the one around whom everything else was centred; and I never saw a creature so dazzlingly beautiful as she was in her bridal robes, when, with Godfrey at her side, she stood up to receive the guests. Everybody who had been bidden was there—everybody except the family from the Ridge House, the Bartons, from whom there came a note of regret, saying that "sudden and severe illness in the family would keep them at home."

"Who can it be? Not Rosamond, for she wrote the regret," Gertie said; and then, as her eyes met mine, we both thought of Tom, who had never been seen in town since the morning of Gertie's bridal.

He had been present at the ceremony; had stood where he could look straight into Gertie's face, and it was said by those who had watched him that his lips quivered spasmodically, and that when it came to the words, "I, Gertrude, take thee, Godfrey, to be my wedded husband," he put up his hand and started as if smitten heavily. He came to me after it was over, and told me all about it, and said, in a half-laughing, half-serious way, that there was a feeling in his head as if a hornet's nest had been stirred up there, and each individual hornet was doing its best to sting him!

Poor Tom! I knew Gertie thought of him many

times that night when she moved a very queen amid the brilliant throng, where only one vied with her at all in point of loveliness, and that one, strangely enough, was Edith, her mother, who, with every shadow lifted from her heart, seemed to have blossomed out again in all the beauty of her early womanhood.

Her dress was a heavy silk of a creamy tint, with overskirt and bertha of soft, rich lace, while at Garret's request she wore her beautiful hair in flowing curls, which were arranged at the back of her head, and held by a coral comb.

Coral was very becoming to Edith, and she wore her full set that night—bracelets, necklace, earrings, and all—and she looked so young and handsome that none would ever have dreamed that she was mother to the bride. They were rather like two sisters, and Mr. Schuyler might have passed for the father of them both. He seemed very proud of her, and in his eyes, which followed her constantly, there was a world of love and tenderness, which told how dear she was to him, even now that everything pertaining to her early life was known to him and the world.

Later in the evening, when the dancing began to flag a little, and the belles and Julia and Alice had contributed their share of "yells and screeches," as Godfrey called their style of singing, Edith was persuaded to take her seat at the piano.

Godfrey said to her as he turned over the leaves of her music:

"Give us one of those sweet, plaintive little airs you used to sing and which make a chap think of—well, the first time he saw Gertie's blue eyes looking at him," and he wound his arms around this blue-eyed bride, who was also standing at Edith's side.

Edith had never tried so much as a single note since the day when she learned from her mother that her daughter was alive, but something told her she could sing now, for the iron fingers were gone for ever, they would never clutch her throat again—and, selecting a German song, which a year before would have been far beyond her power, she began to sing—her voice, which had once been so rich, and full and strong, gathering strength and depth and power as she progressed, soaring up, and up, and up, ever clear, ever sweet, ever singing until the whole house was full of melody, and the astonished guests came flocking in to hear.

"Magnificent," Godfrey exclaimed, as the music ceased, while "Edith, my darling," and "Mamma," were said in the same breath of astonishment as Gertie and Mr. Schuyler laid a hand on Edith's shoulder. "I never dreamed you had a voice like that. I am prouder of you to-night than ever I was before," Mr. Schuyler said, as at a sign from Edith, who refused to sing again, and who was looking very white, he led her away from the piano and out upon a balcony, where she stood a moment to recover herself and force down the rapid beating of her heart ere she told him why she could not sing before, and that with the confession of everything, and the finding of Gertie, her glorious voice had come back to her again.

Five days after the bridal party at Schuyler House Edith and Gertie sat together in the boudoir of the latter, talking of the Providence which had thrown them so constantly together, and of the way in which they were at last made known to each other.

"I have often thought of the night Mrs. Rogers died," Edith said, "and as I recall her manner toward me I think there must have been something on her mind which she wished to tell me about you. Do you suppose she could have known you were my child?"

"No, no, not that, and kept it so many years," Gertie said, "and yet I can remember many things she used to say and hints she used to throw out regarding my parentage, which I interpret differently now from what I did then when my thoughts were all in another channel."

"One would have supposed that knowing as she must have known her liability to sudden death she would have left some writing which might throw light upon your history. You are sure she did not?" Edith said.

And Gertie replied:

"Yes, sure; or at least I think I am. Norah and I looked over everything carefully at the time, and there was nothing but a bundle of old letters and receipts."

"Did you destroy them?" Edith asked.

And Gertie answered her:

"No, I have them still in the box where I keep the souvenirs of my childhood. I'll bring them, if you like, and look them over again, though I am quite sure there is nothing in them."

The box was brought and opened, and, hunting about the bundle of papers and letters, Gertie began to examine them more carefully than ever before.

There were dressmakers' bills and grocers' bills and landlords' bills and music bills for Gertie and letters to Anne Stover and "John Rogers, Birming-

ham," and then Gertie came at last upon a fresher-looking envelope, the seal of which had not been broken, and on which, in Mary Rogers's hand, was written:

"For Mrs. Edith Schuyler, if I die suddenly."

"Oh-h—yes—here—it must be this!" Gertie gasped, as she passed the package to Edith, who was pale as a ghost and whose heart beat with an undefined dread lest after all there might be some mistake and her darling be wrested from her.

"Shall I read it, or you?" she said.

"You—it's for you, you see; but read aloud, if you please. I cannot wait to know."

Edith could not read it aloud, and Gertie did not wait, but leaning over her mother's shoulder read the letter with her.

It was as follows:

"MRS. SCHUYLER—Madam: Warned only this day by a twinge in my heart that I may be taken away suddenly and before I have a chance to tell what, perhaps, I should have told before, I am going to commit to paper the true and veritable history of Gertrude Westbrooke, the girl known as my adopted child, but who has not a single drop of my blood in her veins.

"Mrs. Schuyler, did you ever hear of a beautiful young girl—a very beautiful young girl—who came one day years ago with her mother to a dreary kind of lodging in Dorset Street, London? They had the back rooms looking into a dirty court, and the beautiful girl had a baby born there, a wee little girl baby, with eyes like robin's eggs.

"There was a housemaid, who waited on the ladies in the house; her name was Mary Stover, and she admired the young lady so much, and was curious about her too, especially after the birth of the baby. The housemaid was me, and the beautiful lady was you, who your mother called Heloise. She was Mrs. Fordham then, and I did not like her much. I always mistrusted her of being able to do anything, and, after I accidentally heard what she said to you about sending the child away, I knew she was hard, and kept a watch on her.

"I was going to your room with a jug of water, and heard it all, and saw her the night she went out with a bundle under her arm. I was sure the bundle was the baby, and, when she got back, I let myself out on to that little balcony under your window, and waited till I heard her tell you where she had taken the child. There certainly was a Providence in it that I had a sister nurse in that very hospital, and to make sure that your mother told you true, which I mistrusted, I got leave to go out next day, and went to see my sister.

"By a little clever management I found that a girl baby had been left there the night before, with Heloise pinned to its dress, as Mrs. Fordham said, and that it was farther marked on the bosom with a drop of blood. I got Anne to show the baby to me, and knew it for the same I had seen in your room. You remember I tended it an hour or more on one occasion.

"I love children very much, and this poor deserted one interested me more than I can tell; and I said to myself I'll keep watch over it, and the mother too, and some time maybe I can unravel the mystery, and bring them together. From what I overheard I believed you had been married—made a bad match, most likely—and that your husband was dead, and that was all I knew of him. But I pitied you, and loved the child, and, without telling Anne why, I made her promise to be very kind to the little one.

"When you left Dorset Street I lost trace of you entirely for a while, but that only made me more anxious about the baby. I saw it often, and it soon got to know me and follow me with its pretty eyes, and I loved the little creature more than I can give any reason for. Mother lived in Dorset Street too, and as she was very lonesome from week's end to week's end without us I persuaded her to take the baby for ours. It was hard work to bring her to it, and Anne opposed it too; but something seemed to push me on and say that it must be done, and I got her consent at last, and she took Heloise to her house, where she was just like a little sunbeam, and it was hard to tell which loved her the most, mother, or Anne, or me. I claimed her for mine, and dressed her with my wages, and meant to bring her up above what we were if I could. I had got another place then, and a better one. I was waiting-maid to a Mrs. Westbrooke. She too had a little baby-girl, named Gertrude, and, when it died suddenly, I thought she would have mourned herself to death for it.

"About that time mother went off with cholera, and then I told Mrs. Westbrooke about my baby, and asked if I might bring it and show it to her. You don't know how pretty she was, with her golden-red hair curling all over her head, and her sweet blue eyes. My lady got very fond of her the three days she stayed with me, and, when I spoke of carrying it away, she said:

"Mary, I do not believe I can let baby go. It

seems like my own lost darling. Will you let me have her?"

"For your own?" I said, and she answered:

"Yes, Mary, for my own."

"This was just what suited me—to see my pet grow up a lady—and I told her yes, and, as the master did not oppose it more than to say 'it was a piece of nonsense—that he did not care especially for other people's children, and this one must be kept out of his way,' it was settled that baby should stay, and I do believe my mistress came to love it like her own. She gave it her lost baby's name, and had it christened 'Gertrude Heloise Westbrooke,' so that it should have a name. She was a sweet-tempered lady, but weakly and nervous like. I think she had consumption, for nothing in particular appeared to ail her, only she was tired like all the time, and never could sleep nor get rested, and at last she lay down to die, and left an annuity of forty pounds a year to little Gertrude, and said I was to have the care of her.

"About a year after her death the master married again, a fashionable, fussy little woman from Glasgow, who disliked children worse than he did, and never noticed Gertie in any way after she found out that she was only adopted and not Mr. Westbrooke's own. I was about to be married myself, and asked the master if I might have the child. He was more than willing, and so I took her to my comfortable home. All this time I had not been able to trace you, and many's the time I drew my little girl to the gardens of Kensington and even to Hyde Park, where I sat by the hour watching the people as they went by in hopes of seeing you. But I never did, and I had almost given it up, when one day in October I went into a linendrapers' and got a new slip for my darling. The girls were all busy, and I had to wait a bit, and was looking at the dresses in the window when I heard some one say, 'Isn't she beautiful?' and looking up I saw you coming in. I knew you in a moment, though you were handsomer than ever, and looking well and strong. In my excitement I forgot what I had come to get, but stood watching you, my heart beating so loud I was afraid you might hear it.

"I do not remember what you bought, but you ordered it to be sent to 'Mrs. Barrett, Caledonia Street,' and then left the shop, while I followed close behind. You turned into that shady lane or court which leads past the Holland House to Bayswater, and I kept as near you as I could without attracting your attention. Once you sat down under a tree as if you were tired, and going a little farther on I sat down too and watched you when you did not know it. There was a pretty little girl about Gertie's age playing near, and I remember you called her to you and smoothed her curls and caressed her little hands and asked her for her name, and when she went back to her nurse there was a sad, sorry look in your eyes and on your face, and I said to myself, 'Is she thinking of the baby, I wonder?'

"I knew from Anne that a woman in deep black, with her veil drawn closely over her face, had been to the hospital to inquire after it, and had seemed relieved when told it had been taken by a woman who was sure to be kind to it. I was certain the lady in black was your mother, but could not tell whether she had ever inquired again for the child. I meant to know for sure where you lived, and if Caledonia Street was your home, so when you got up, which you did after a time, I got up too, and kept close behind till you reached Notting Hill station. I was standing by you when you got your ticket and took the same carriage you did, and, alighting at the same station, followed you to your very door and saw you go in like one who was at home.

"There was a baker's shop near by, and I bought some bread and buns which I did not want and questioned the girl who waited upon me with regard to the houses in the neighbourhood, pretending I was looking for one to rent. In this way I learned that Mrs. Barrett took lodgers and had a beautiful daughter, a Miss Lyle, the child of a first marriage, the girl supposed, as old Dr. Barrett, who had owned the place for a long time, had only been married to the present Mrs. Barrett two or three years when he died. So much I learned and then I left the place for home, determining to keep trace of you after that and not lose sight of you again, and I did. I knew when you were governess, and when you played the organ in church, and used sometimes on Sundays to take Gertie to listen to the music, but never gave her a hint as to who the musician was. There was a kind of pleasant excitement in thus watching you and feeling that I had your secret, and I enjoyed it to the full.

"At last you were lost to me for a time, while I nursed my husband in his last illness, but greatly to my delight you unexpectedly turned up again at the very house where my Cousin Norah was living as lady's maid. I saw you there one evening when I was calling on Norah, and learned that you were Mrs. Seymour's companion, and were to travel with her. As Norah too was to accompany her mistress I was certain to know when you returned, and

I did, and saw you dressed for dinner one day, and thought you the most beautiful woman I ever saw.

"I was a widow then. My husband had been dead some time, but he had left me quite comfortable for a woman of my class, while Gertie's annuity was sufficient for her. I was anxious that she should have a good education, and I tried to bring her up as a lady so far as I knew myself. Just what I intended to do, or whether I should ever let you know of her existence, had now become a matter of some doubt, for I loved the girl too well to part with her willingly. She was the very apple of my eye, and I said unless something happens to me, or her mother marries rich, I will keep the secret all my life. Still I liked to be near you, to know just what you were doing, and so I applied to your mother for apartments—with what success you know.

"Then Mr. Schuyler came, and Norah told me of your probable marriage with him, and I had a great battle with duty and my love for little Gertie. The first told me that when you were in a position to do for the child what I never could I ought to give her up, while the last said I never could, she was all the world to me, and so I decided to keep her. You can imagine the interest I have felt in you and every thing belonging to you, and how at times, when I saw my darling snubbed by the young ladies at the House, I have been tempted to claim her right to be those as their equal and companion.

"I never could tell whether Mr. Schuyler knew that such a child had ever had existence. If he did not, and your passing for Miss Lyle instead of Mrs. made me suspect that he did not, I thought it would be much easier for me to tell it to him, and that of itself might have kept me from it, even if I had loved her less. If it was not for this frequent pain which warns me of sudden death, I should perhaps keep the secret for ever, but I must not leave my little girl alone if anything happens to me, and so I wrote it down, begging you to take her and do justice to her, for I never to have seen her in the child born in Dorset Street of the young woman, Heloise or Edith Lyle, whose mother called herself Mrs. Fordham.

"Perhaps you need not confess the truth to your husband, if he does not already know it, but you can at least adopt Gertie and treat her as your own, and this I beg of you truly.

"And now I have told you all I know. Who Gertie's father was or where he died is a secret to me; only this is sure, the girl known as Gertie Westbrooke is your own daughter, and may Heaven deal with you and punishment you according as you deal with her when I am gone. MARY ROGERS."

This was the letter which Edith and Gertie read together, the latter with burning cheeks and tears wet eyes, while the former was pale as ashes and almost felt the touch of the iron fingers as she was again taken back to those dreadful days in Dorset Street when the great sorrow of her life had come upon her. Had she wanted any proof of Gertie's identity she had it before her, but she did not. She was sure upon that point, and, clasping the beautiful girl in her arms, she burst into a paroxysm of tears, moaning softly:

"My darling, my baby; it seems so like a dream, and Heaven has been so good to keep you all the time and bring you at last to me. Oh, if mother could have known! She always loved you from the time you went to lodge with her in London."

"Mamma," Gertie said, suddenly, "she did know! I am sure of it, or she must have guessed. It was the night she died when I was sitting with her, and accidentally mentioned my birth-mark—that drop of blood. I remember how excited she grew and how hard she tried to talk and tell me something, but could not. It must have been her suspicion of the truth."

"Perhaps so. I would like to believe she knew it," Edith answered, and then they talked more freely than they had ever talked before of Edith's early married life; of the time she lived at the little vine-wreathed cottage, and from her chamber window watched the building of the house which was now her home and the young husband who worked upon it and met his death so tragically.

And then Edith told her daughter of the Lyles in Alnwick, the sweet-faced old lady knitting in the sunshine, and the bare-armed Jennie, who had so shamed and disgusted her.

Gertie was interested in the grandmother at once, and proposed writing to her immediately, and telling her that the son whom she had mourned so long had left a child who would some day find her in her humble home and call her grandmamma.

But Edith opposed this plan, feeling intuitively that Jennie Nesbit had only to know of rich relations to pack her things and start on for Schuyler Hill; and this Edith could not endure, nor would she voluntarily subject her husband to the humiliation; so she dissuaded Gertie from her project of writing, telling her that in the spring, she could, if Godfrey thought best, call at that cottage in Alnwick and see her father's mother.

(To be continued.)



[RHETT'S SECRET.]

A MYSTERY.

"WELL," remarked Mrs. Porson in confidence to herself, with a significant glance through the open door leading to the dining-room, "that man is what I should call a mystery!"

Mrs. Porson was the landlady of "The Eagle," a comfortable tavern nestling among the Hampshire hills, and the person for whom she had deliberately selected her epithet was her lodger.

He sat, as she spoke, with his back toward her and the open door. He faced a window whence his eyes looked forth in a wistful, soulful way upon the landscape—the June hills, with here and there a blue pond like a jewel, the clouds brushing like white wings across the surface of the scene.

He was a man of middle age, a gentleman—at least as far as appearances went. His dark hair was prematurely streaked with gray; his eyes were restless and hungry; his whole air one of self-command and equipoise.

"Well, mother," said a portly man, just entering the back door, "his luggage has come, and letters by the mail."

"Then he means to stop?"

"I think so."

"Has he got his letters?"

"Yes, I told Joe to take 'em in."

The subject of the above conversation—Mr. Rhett Falconer—had made himself, unwittingly, an object of interest, to speak mildly, in and about Hillbush. He came thither one summer morning, with no incumbrance save his trout-basket, rod and reels, and put up at "The Eagle." As a lodger he had but one fault, he could not be got acquainted with—that is, according to the Hillbush standard. That standard demanded an explicit detail of one's personal affairs, and in well-bred fashion Mr. Falconer turned a deaf ear toward all inuendoes or inquiries leading to such an exposure. Either he did not understand that it was

customary for a stranger to "say his catechism" or, understanding, would not comply. Which Mrs. Porson intended soon to ascertain.

In the meantime Mr. Falconer had received his letters, and hastily broken the seal of one addressed delicately in a woman's hand.

"My darling"—ran the letter—"I reply without delay to say how truly happy your letter made me. You say you feel a 'mysterious drawing' towards Hillbush. I myself believe in such instincts. In our lovely home, free to cultivate our tastes, to worship nature, to enjoy ourselves, why should we not be happy, apart from and independent of the world? There will be vulgar curiosity to defy anywhere. As well confront it in a place which pleases you, owing to location, etc., as to look elsewhere. So, once for all, I would say, consult your own inclinations entirely. If you are happy, I shall be so, as I am."

"Yours devotedly,

R. FALCONER."

There was a soft smile in the man's eyes as he finished reading and folded his letter. It was still there when Mrs. Porson came in to see if Mr. Falconer would have anything more for breakfast.

"I have fared sumptuously, my dear madam," he replied, and his happy eyes did not escape her, nor the chirography of the letter in his hand; "but I am glad to see you, to inquire if you could accommodate a lady who may wish to come here for a few days."

"A lady," repeated Mrs. Porson, slowly, and her eyes narrowed, and her lips pursed. An unexplained man was bad enough, but an unexplained woman! Mrs. Porson felt her professional and matronly reputation at stake. "Well, you see, sir, yours is the best room in the house; you'd want another for the lady?"

"Certainly." Mr. Falconer got up. "It is of no great consequence. I suppose I can get partially settled within a week"—as if to himself. Then quietly to Mrs. Porson, "I shall be a neighbour in-

stead of a guest within a few days. I am going to live a mile or two out, on the Chalkstone road. I believe the place is called 'The Cedars'."

In relating the conversation afterwards Mrs. Porson declared she felt as if she "could have dropped." Certainly she turned very red.

"Upon my word, sir, I am glad you like us so well," she managed to say.

"I like you very much," smiled Mr. Falconer. "My mother and I think we shall settle down here for life."

"Ah, indeed, sir. 'The Cedars.' A pretty place, but it wants a handful of money and a power of help. But you know your own business best, sir."

"I trust we shall make it comfortable."

"No doubt, sir, no doubt. When you said a lady, Mr. Falconer, I didn't know but you meant your wife. You must excuse me."

He smiled seriously.

"You must excuse me, Mrs. Porson, for not having any wife."

"There be gentlemen who get their cage first, and then their bird," ventured the landlady.

Mr. Falconer's face, however, announced that the conversation was at an end, and, leaving Mrs. Porson to lament, he took his way without toward the office where the title-deed of "The Cedars" lay waiting the signatures.

"By the way, Mr. Falconer," remarked the lawyer who had officiated in the purchase, as the two stood somewhat later upon the office steps, "there are two of your future neighbours—your nearest neighbours, I believe—just entering the opposite shop."

Mr. Falconer glanced carelessly across the way. "Women!" he assented, in a tone whose civil disgust the lawyer detected.

"Yes; lone women at that," he replied, with a low laugh, "but a little different from the general run, to do them justice. Channings. You know the Channings?" He paused, and Mr. Falconer bowed. "These are the last, and none too soon. Queer, sir, how these old families go to seed. One of these Channings was a lawyer for three or four generations. Then Guy Channing, that young woman's grandfather, clever lawyer, high liver, began to make things fly, and her father finished what his father began. I suspect the women folks are pretty poor, but they hold their heads high as the best. The girl's a beauty."

Mr. Falconer's face had evinced some slight interest while the lawyer was speaking, until he uttered the last words. At these a determined indifference shut down over it like a visor. What had he to do with a woman who was young, beautiful and unfortunate?

Deborah Channing did not look the last as she stood, the unconscious object of the foregoing description, waiting for her mother to complete her transactions in early cucumbers, eggs and calico. She looked simply handsome and happy. Feminine Hillbush did not admit her beauty. She was too large, and her hair was red, absolutely red; and she was proud. In short, Miss Channing was unpopular.

Worse than all, she knew Greek and Latin, and would harness a horse or drive a cow just like a boy. None of these atrocities appeared, however, as she stood there in the morning sunshine, oblivious to the fact that Nicholas Dale, who, as usual, had driven them to town that day, was waiting to join her at her pleasure.

"The Eagle" adjoined the shop, and Mrs. Porson, perceiving Deborah, put on her bonnet, and hastened over with her news.

"Good morning, Miss Channing. There's great doings up your way, I hear."

"Ah!" said the young lady, turning her brilliant gray eyes upon Mrs. Porson's red face. "I know of nothing new in our neighbourhood."

"What! You don't know that 'The Cedars' is sold to a rich bachelor, and he's moving in, with his mother to keep house for him?"

"I had not heard," said the girl, lazily.

"What are you saying, Mrs. Porson?" inquired young Dale, coming forward at the opportunity.

The landlady winked facetiously.

"The young men up your way 'll have to look out for themselves now. You're going to have a new neighbour—been boarding with us for a few days. He's as handsome as a pictor, and about as set up as anybody. An old bachelor, and rich enough to buy up Hillbush."

Mrs. Porson embellished and repeated her news to Mrs. Channing, who, however much interested, was hurried, and reluctantly followed her daughter, after a moment's pause.

The phaeton, drawn by the rough Dale sorrels, was jogging quietly out of the village, when the crack team of Hillbush dashed rather ostentatiously by. There were two gentlemen in the vehicle.

"That must be him now," said Nicholas.

"Which?" asked Mrs. Channing.

"Who?" asked Deborah.

"Why, the man who's bought 'The Cedars'; not the one driving, the other one of course."

Relays of workmen, plenty of money, in short, to do the magical work, and "The Cedars" underwent rapid transformation, and Mr. Falconer seemed quite absorbed in his plans and executions.

It was several weeks before his mother came.

When Mrs. Falconer gets here, said the gossips, we shall find out who and what they are. But Mrs. Falconer, handsome, haughty, less approachable than her son, held the gossips aloof, and Hillbush by degrees coincided with Mrs. Person, and set Mr. Rhett Falconer down as a mystery.

Blissfully unconscious of his classification Mr. Falconer and his mother abandoned themselves to what was evidently a delightful phase in their existence.

"Come what will, mother, we will wander no more. This is our home. We will live down curiosity, and enjoy ourselves, despite suspicion."

Mrs. Falconer sat in her great chair on the porch; her son, with his cigar, on the first step at her feet. She leaned forward, and laid her white, slender hand tenderly, oh, how tenderly upon his head.

"My poor boy!" she said, almost passionately.

He looked up blithely.

"You need not pity me, mother, now. I am happy."

"Oh, Rhett! it is the world I pity for losing you."

"It will never know its loss," he said, gaily.

The woman sighed. How brilliant and honoured, how beloved and courted, he ought to have been! Instead of that, exiled, preyed upon by suspicions, hunted down. It was too unjust. This is what she was thinking.

Meanwhile Deborah Channing, with her daily work, had little time to indulge her curiosity concerning her new neighbours, even if curiosity belonged to her temper and blood. There was very little poetry in this work—two women making their living off a few stony acres, unaided, except as Nicholas Dale ploughed and reaped their grain. But in the long, restful afternoons, from her window she saw the heavily laden wains "go by to 'The Cedars,'" and wondered over the luxury of the life such possessions involved.

It was only a passing wonder, however, and might never have borne the smallest fruit, but for an accident wherein the mystery of Rhett Falconer's fortunes hinged.

Mrs. Channing was churning early one morning—so early that there was still only a blooming promise of sunrise in the east; and Deborah, at the critical moment when the butter was like to come, had gone with her bucket to a spring across the road, and was returning with the icy cool water needed in the dairy when she espied in the dust two richly bound books. She lifted them, and glanced at the titles—"David Copperfield," and "Old Curiosity Shop"—new and unknown names to her.

There was nothing to indicate the owner, but she had no doubt that they had fallen from a chest of books which had gone by in Mr. Falconer's waggon the preceding afternoon.

"What shall I do about them, mother?" she asked, having explained her discovery.

"Dress yourself by-and-by, and carry them home.

It is an excellent excuse for getting acquainted."

"Oh, mother! I would not thrust myself upon strangers so for the world. I almost wish I had left them in the dust. But that would not have been fair. And, since I have them, I must not keep them, or make their return a matter of any import. I will take them back at once. No one but the servants will be up." And she turned directly to fulfil her resolution.

The sun was rising as she walked up the road. The mists rolled away in filmy gold from the emerald hills; every spear glittered; every bird sang with a mad joy. Deborah knew every phase of this marvellous hour; she could feel its thrill while her eyes were glancing over the pages of the books she carried.

Straight on to "The Cedars" she went, devouring snatches of that tenderest and sweetest of stories; straight up to the very house, toward the side entrance of times gone by, and, stopping mechanically, lifted her eyes and found her bearings altogether false.

There was no longer a side entrance, at least not here. A low, broad flight of steps, long French windows, a wide room, panelled, fitted with rows of shelves, a confusion of books, and, in the foreground, as it were, of the picture, a gentleman in his shirt-sleeves, smoking, and having apparently paused in his work among his books to enjoy the outdoor splendour, out of which Deborah Channing, with her red-gold hair, her sumptuous height, and large, free tread, seemed to appear like an incarnate Aurora.

She glanced at him more coolly than he at her.

"I have found a couple of volumes in the road, which I suppose belong to Mr. Falconer," she said, closing and holding them out.

"Yes, they are mine," he answered, courteously. "I am under many obligations."

He took them, and she bowed and turned away.

"You were reading as you approached," he remarked, with some hesitation. "Have you never read 'David Copperfield'?"

"I have not."

"Let me beg you to do so then," and he offered to return the volume.

"Thank you. I have not much time for reading novels."

"Allow me to say it is a great misfortune not to find time."

"I fear I should have to keep it too long," was her rejoinder. "And, beside, if you begin to lend your books, sir, you will find yourself the owner of a circulating library. Good morning."

She turned away, and on the instant an ugly mastiff, whose eye had been following her movements, sprang before her with a growl.

"Dare!" said Mr. Falconer, in a low tone, which might have cowed a lion, and he stepped to Deborah's side.

The dog cringed as if he had had a blow, and was slinking away.

"Did he frighten you?"

"Not inasmuch as you were so near," she said.

"Permit me to walk with you to the road. Come, Dare. We owe this lady our gratitude, not our growls. What may I call you, madam?" turning abruptly from his dog to her.

"My name is Deborah Channing, your next neighbour."

"This is Miss Channing, Dare, you understand, sir."

Dare gave a short bark. Deborah extended her hand toward her new acquaintance's head, whereat he attached himself to her side.

"It has been my misfortune, Miss Channing, to have to defend myself against the too keen interest and solicitude of my fellow-men. Dare has been one of my means of defence."

"Ah!" said Deborah, quietly. "I hope Dare will forget that he has been obliged to attend to my case. I hope you will forget it, also, Mr. Falconer. If I had a servant, I should not have done my own errand. At this hour I trust you will acquit me of any intention of making a call expressive of either solicitude or interest."

Mr. Falconer crimsoned at her sarcasm. And as she ceased speaking they reached the gate. He laid his hand quickly upon it.

"Miss Channing, you have done me a kindness, and I have received it like a dog. I cannot let you go with the impression you must have of me."

"I am not quick at impressions, Mr. Falconer, and mother is waiting breakfast for me."

"In that case it is to your interest to succumb quickly," he smiled. "You must accept the loan of 'David Copperfield,' in token that you have no opinion of me at all."

"There is no token needed. But if you keep me a minute more there may be, and either case precludes my taking the book."

He bowed without a word and opened the gate for her.

"Good morning, Mr. Falconer."

"Shortly, Miss Channing, I am going to ascertain where you live, that I may have the pleasure of bringing 'David Copperfield' over by-and-by."

"Mr. Falconer," she said, demurely, "do you think I might borrow Dare?"

He laughed this time.

"You will not need him. My interest or solicitude never takes the form of calls."

He saw her preparing mischief in reply.

"Permit me to say that my mother does not share my peculiarities. She will be happy to form the acquaintance of Guy Channing's grand-daughter."

Deborah's face lighted at the allusion.

"Mother and I will pay our respects to Mrs. Falconer, with pleasure," she said, unaffectedly.

"It is going to be a warm day," quoth Mr. Falconer.

"Yes, for the haymakers," responded Deborah, and they were back to the safe level of the common place.

"This is my home," said Deborah, loftily, at the hingeless gate. "If you will come in, I can offer you a glass of buttermilk."

"Thank you; it might taste of hospitality on which I have no claim."

He lifted his hat, motioned to Dare, who stood uncertain which to follow, and the interview was over. Deborah had not known she was excited. Suddenly she felt how wildly her heart beat.

"Why, child," cried her mother, "where have you been so long? And who was that who left you at the gate?"

"Mr. Falconer, mother. His dog frightened me, so he insisted on coming home with me."

"Really! And they say he has not spoken a civil word to any one in Hillbush."

"I can hardly imagine his speaking an uncivil word," said Deborah, warmly.

Her mother glanced toward her. How brilliant she looked.

"Did you go there bareheaded, Deborah?"

"My hat was on my arm. I forgot it."

Mr. Falconer walked rapidly home. Strangely enough, his heart too beat more quickly than common.

"What a superb creature," he mused. "I would venture all I possess that there is neither a sham nor secret in her heart."

Mrs. Channing and Deborah went duly and formally to call at "The Cedars."

Mrs. Falconer was cordially glad to see them, Rhett having said, "Cultivate the Channings, if you like, mother."

Her son was out. In fact, he spent two hours—from four to six—every day, about the farm. She would show the ladies over the house, when they were rested; so she talked.

It was an interior well worth seeing. It made Deborah think of her dreamland, and her mother of her early bridal days, when she little expected the old house at Hillbush would be her lifetime home.

"It is Rhett's taste," said the hostess. "A quiet country home has been his hobby for some years."

"Unless he is well inured to quiet, he will be apt to find it tiresome after a while," remarked Mrs. Channing.

A deep crimson flush passed over Mrs. Falconer's sunless face as she said:

"My son has too many resources at command to suffer from enui."

"Yes," said Deborah, warmly, "with his books and horses, his land to look after, I am sure he has enough to content him."

"You think so, Miss Channing?" said a deep, rich voice from the foot of the stairs which the ladies were descending. "Should you be contented with these and nothing more?" and he smiled a welcome, extending his hand.

"I am contented with much less, Mr. Falconer," she rejoined.

"Yes, the case is different," he muttered.

By Mrs. Falconer's order the tea-table had been laid during their tour of the house, laid for three.

"I want you to taste our raspberries, Mrs. Channing," said Mrs. Falconer. "We are country neighbours, and must not be formal."

"My dear mother, your tea-table looks decidedly informal for a hungry farmer," remarked the son.

"I did not expect 'a hungry farmer' for an hour to come," responded the mother. "Mrs. Channing, let me persuade you and your daughter to sit on the porch for half-hour, and then share our supper before returning."

"Mr. Falconer declined my hospitality, for fear he should not like its taste," remarked Deborah; "and, beside, dear Mrs. Falconer, it is our milking time."

But Mrs. Channing was less loth to sup at "The Cedars," and Rhett said to Deborah "Please stay," in a tone that made her colour come. In short, they found themselves detained, not unwillingly, while the cook, glad of an opportunity to display her skill, served them sumptuously within the hour.

While they were waiting Mr. Falconer took Deborah to the library, saying:

"I want to show you how hard I have worked. My books are placed and catalogued."

"I wish you could see my library," said Deborah; "it is in the garret."

"I should like to see it, but, you know—I never visit."

"Ah," said Deborah, with displeasure.

"See," he said, "here is a little niche I am making for my 'David Copperfield.'"

"Do you then, value it so highly?"

"Yes; since the other morning when you found it in the dust."

Mrs. Channing and Deborah walked homeward in the starry twilight.

"Most agreeable people, really," remarked the elder lady. "The Dales and the Wheatsons will be somewhat surprised to hear of our reception at 'The Cedars,'"

"Oh, mother, pray let us not speak of it."

"Not speak of it! But, well, I don't know but you are right. Some one appreciates you, Deborah, at last, that is evident. Ah, such a settlement as that! dear girl—"

"Mother! I implore you never to hint such a thing again."

"Silly child, of course I shall not hint it all around Hillbush. But it was so evident—his admiration. What harm in speaking of it together?"

"Mr. Falconer may admire me," returned the girl,

steadily, "or what seemed admiration may be his usual manner; but—there is something, mother, something about him unlike other men."

Mrs. Channing smiled in the dusk. The admiration was reciprocal she conceived.

"We will have them to drink tea with us some day," she remarked. "I think my biscuits are a little lighter, and my jelly a trifle clearer, than even their professed cook can make."

Every one, says Goethe, is drunk, once in a lifetime. Perhaps this night, of all other times, was the one when Deborah was so. A new life had come to her; her idle dreams seemed contemptible, her whole past not worth the living. Over and over again, as she lay awake, she recalled every precious word and look that Rhett Falconer had given her during that memorable afternoon. As yet she had had enough. She counted on nothing, coveted nothing but what she had experienced.

Neither was she suffered to endure the pangs of hope deferred in the coming days. Mr. Falconer did not visit, as he had said, but he contrived some intercourse between the houses for almost every day. He stopped at the gate with a string of trout, or a book, or a bunch of flowers, and, having stopped there, lingered to talk. Or a message came from Mrs. Falconer, begging Miss Channing to let her work over to "The Cedars" for an hour of an afternoon; and the whole thing went forward so quietly that but one person, outside the two families, suspected the intimacy, or concerned themselves about the consequences.

This one person was Nicholas Dale. A man less slow, less persistent in his passion would have declared his love, and had it rejected years before; for he had adored Deborah since his earliest recollection. He had been her passive slave in their school-days—the patient victim of her caprices since. He was not over-discriminating in most things, but he knew enough not to hazard his chance upon an avowal yet. Carefully avoiding the rôle of a lover, he bided his time.

With the fine instinct of love he now divined this new intimacy and its character. Never hasty, however, he waited and watched. Deborah herself could not have chronicled every incident with more exactitude. And yet she never suspected his jealousy, least of all its result. He continued his visits, on Sunday evenings, just as of old. He was ready and friendly, as he had always been, in neighbourly offices. His self-control was the price he laid out to pay for Deborah. For he meant to have her. Nothing in heaven or earth, he said, should take her from him. He was young, good looking, well off, and Deborah had liked him for years. Should a stranger come between them?—a stranger, who had that poorest of all records, no record at all—who might be a thief, or a gambler, or worse—should he come in and snatch the prize from a worthy and patient wooer? Nicholas Dale's whole will said, No!

The summer came to an end. The dreary, long-some autumn weather hung heavily over "The Cedars." On one of the dreariest and most lonesome afternoons Nicholas Dale, for the first time, walked up to Mr. Falconer's door, and requested an interview with the master of the place. He was taken to the library where Mr. Falconer was reading alone. He rose and offered his visitor a seat. Nicholas waved him away.

"I have come on business which can be transacted standing. I have come, Mr. Falconer, to know if you have any intention of seeking Deborah Channing in marriage, and, if so, whether your character and antecedents entitle you to woo such a woman?"

It was plainly put, at least. Rhett Falconer almost staggered as he stood. It was so utterly unexpected; it involved what was so painful; above all, it was so coarse.

"It seems to cost you little to put your questions, Mr. Dale. May I inquire—in order that we understand each other—on whose authority you act?"

"My own."

"Upon Miss Channing's knowledge?"

"No."

"Then I deny your right to question me entirely. On what, pray, do you find it?"

"On my love for Deborah Channing, which would outweigh my love of life; and on my suspicion of you, sir, who would come between us."

"Mr. Dale, you overstep the bounds of discretion and breeding. Go you and try your fortune with Miss Channing, as I, if I see fit, will try mine, and excuse me from any further discussion on the subject to-day."

"Mr. Falconer, you think to carry things with a high hand, but I have come here to make terms to-day. You cannot escape me!"—and Nicholas Dale touched the breast pocket of his coat significantly. "I will know who and what you are, and whether or not you love Deborah Channing—or I will kill you."

Rhett Falconer stepped toward the bell-ropes for reply, and as he rang Dale, maddened by jealousy and failure, drew his pistol, aimed and fired.

His victim fell, the blood spurting from his mouth. There was a wild shriek through the house, and in an instant Mrs. Falconer was bending over the prostrate form of her son. Fright and confusion surged through the house, messengers came and went, doctors arrived, and through all Nicholas Dale, having dropped his pistol and sunk upon a couch, covered his face with his hands, and sat there impassive. Somebody thought of him at last—and shuddered. Young Dale a murderer! It was too dreadful to believe. He was taken into custody, however, to await the issue of his act.

Oh, that awaiting! Both for the one who knew now how wildly and wickedly he had acted, and how in any event he had lost Deborah; and for the others—the innocent man stricken and suffering for no fault of his, the distracted mother, watching while life and death hung in the balance.

There were weeks of terrible suspense to all involved. The physicians had little or no hope of Mr. Falconer's recovery from the first, and when eventually some unfavourable symptoms appeared they broke to him gently his critical condition. He smiled.

"If they knew how little I had to live for," he said to his mother, when they were gone. "But, mother," he continued, "I have a wish which it is time to indulge. I wish to see Deborah Channing."

"It is true, then, Rhett; you love her?"

"What has a dying man to do with love, mother? I am going to tell her my secret."

Deborah came. It was, oh, so cruel, that he should have suffered for her; and she faltered something to that effect.

"I do not regret it, Deborah. If I did not lie here dying I could not tell you what I mean to to-day. Will it shock you, Deborah, to know that I have been an inmate of a prison for ten long years?"

It did shock her terribly. She sat silent.

"That," Rhett continued, "I might have told you any time—when I could. The rest I can only tell because I have but a few more days to live. I inherited a fortune," he went on, "and, not from necessity, but for love of business, took a clerkship, when quite young, in a bank. There was a forgery committed, and circumstances pointed to me as the forger. With proofs in my possession which would have exonerated another I was tried, convicted, and sentenced."

Deborah could not control her horror. She shuddered.

"The guilty party," said Mr. Falconer, calmly, "was a young man, but with a wife and child. What was the sacrifice of my life to his? Besides, he was my dearest friend. I would have died for him. I could certainly suffer imprisonment for him."

"But justice," murmured Deborah.

"It was accomplished. I knew that he would never sin again."

"And he has not?"

"No. He lives respected, honoured, and beloved. I, since my ten years' imprisonment, have gone skulking through life. I thought here, at last, I should find peace. I shall, Deborah, the peace which passeth understanding."

"Oh, miserable 'Cedars,' would you had never seen them."

"Not so. For then, Deborah, I should never have seen you."

"Me! You must hate me!"

"No, Deborah, I love you. Remember, I speak as a dying man. I never knew I should want an untaught name, as I have wanted it to offer you. I would not offer one stained as mine is."

"Stained!" she murmured, "so then are the martyrs!"

He pressed her hand feebly.

"It is too late."

She sprang to her feet before him.

"It is not. Rhett—Rhett—I love you. Live for me."

The doctors next morning found their patient worse—much worse. The symptoms baffled them. Yet some way he gained strength in spite of them. He battled with disease; he clung to his life. And he lived.

"The Cedars" was sold in the spring, and in June there was a quiet wedding in the old Channing homestead, and then, Channings and Falconers, went away from Hillbush—the mystery deepened, not solved; and Nicholas Dale, older and sadder, knew that he deserved his loss.

Rhett Falconer was a wanderer once more, but nowise discontented with his lot. But it seemed to him that their obscure if happy life would be irksome to Deborah.

"My wife," he said, "the man for whom I suffered once is merciful and just. If you say so, I will go to him. At my demand he will confess his fault and

his deception. At his own expense he will reinstate us."

Deborah shook her head.

"Let him keep his false jewels and wear them. We know that we have the true, even if we have to wrap them in a mystery."

W. H. P.

FACETIAE.

It has been discovered that the word quick can be pronounced quicker by adding two more letters to it.

"GENTLY the dews are o'er me stealing," as the man said when he had five due-bills presented to him at one time.

MACAULAY ON MUTTON.—Mr. Macaulay once observed that prize sheep were only fit for candles, and prize essays to light them.

One person asked another if he believed in the appearance of spirits. "No," was the reply, "but I believe in their disappearance, for I've missed a bottle of gin since last night."

A SURGEON writes from the gold fields of Australia that he has now quite disbarred the laudanum, and opens the veins with a pickaxe.

SUITABLE BIRTHDAY PRESENT.—To a dear young lady. A handsomely bound copy of the treatise, *How to Dress on Fifteen Pounds a Week*.—*Punch*.

A FIRENOLOGIST told a man that he had combative ness very largely developed, and was of a quarrelsome disposition. "That isn't so," said the man, angrily, "and if you repeat it I'll knock you down."

WHAT is the greatest feast in the eating way ever known? That record of a man who commenced by bolting a door, after which he threw up a window, and then sat down and swallowed a whole story!

AT THE BRIGHTON AQUARIUM.

Georgina: "What funny fish! What are they, Gus?"

Gus: "Aw—codlings. Pantomime season, aw! aw codlings, of course, aw!"—*Fun*.

"ANNA, dear, if I should attempt to spell Cupid, why could I not get beyond the first syllable?" Anna gave it up, whereupon William said: "Because when I come to C u, of course I cannot go any farther."

A MAN in Indians, on returning home from a business journey recently, found that his wife, during his absence, had rifled all the furniture and departed, and the sheriff arrested him for allowing gambling on his premises.

A VEST pedantic young man, wishing to ask a young lady if he might speak to her for a few moments, wanted to know, "if he could roll the wheel of conversation around the axis tree of her understanding for a moment." The poor girl fainted.

DRY.—A jeweller labelled some diamonds in his window as being "as sparkling as the tears of a young widow." A customer looked in and said he thought under those circumstances the water would not prove enduring. The label is not there now.—*Fun*.

THE father of Dorabella recently found that little girl's hands full of blossoms of a beautiful tea rose on which he had bestowed great care. "My dear," he said, "didn't I tell you not to pick one of those flowers without leave?" "Yes, papa," said she, "but all these had leaves."

WHEN the late King of Saxony didn't come to supper promptly in the days of his youth his father would go to the back door and would cry sharply to his son and heir, "You, John-Nepomue-Marie-Joseph-Anthony-Xavir-Vincent-de-Paul-Stanislaus-Bernard-Paul-Felix-Damans, come in out of that."

CERTAIN near-sighted lady could never be induced to admit the fact, but persisted in declaring that her sight was excellent. One day a waggish neighbour stuck a needle in the side of a barn and placing her on the other side of the road asked her if she could see it. "Oh, yes," she replied, looking in the direction indicated, "but where's the barn?"

BECOMING JEWELLERY.

Jeweller: "What kind of a chain would you like?"

Young Man: "Well, I hardly know. What kind of one do you think I ought to have? That is, what style do you think would be the most becoming for a young man who carries groceries to the best families in town?"

AN ORNAMENT TO SOCIETY.

(One that might be dispensed with.)

Gloomy and Dissipated Youth (who has discovered that life is not worth having): "I hope I shan't be alive after thirty!"

Unsympathetic Elderly Party: "Is there any particular necessity that you should be alive till thirty?"—*Punch*.

FOR THE NEXT BUDGET.—"A Tax of twopence a day on all foreigners in France" is said to be under consideration. Does not this suggest to Mr. Gladstone a splendid opportunity? Let him only impose

a tax on all foreigners in England, being organ-grinders or street-musicians of any description, and he will so endear himself to the whole country that we shall hear no more of Conservative reaction.—*Punch.*

A NUISANCE.

Prisoner (to learned magistrate): "Has any one a right to commit a nuisance?"

Learned Magistrate: "No, sir, not even the mayor, no, sir, not even the governor."

Prisoner: "Then you can't commit me; for I was arrested as a nuisance, and you've decided that I am one."

TERRIBLE RESULT OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF WOMEN!

Miss Hypatia Jones, spinster of arts (on her way to refreshment), informs Professor Parallax, F.R.S., that "young men do very well to look at, or to dance with, or even to marry, and all that kind of thing!" but that "as to enjoying any rational conversation with any man under fifty, that is completely out of the question!"—*Punch.*

FRENCH GRANDILOQUENCE.

A Gascon was talking in a very bombastic style of himself and levelling the pretensions of every other person with the utmost contempt, when a listener said:

"Pray, sir, what may your business be?"

"Oh," replied the Gascon, "I am but a cork cutter, but then it is in a very large way."

"Indeed!" replied the other, "then I presume you are a cutter of bungs!"

AN INTIMATE ACQUAINTANCE WITH FOREIGN POTENTATES.

Mrs. Jones: "Lor', Bill! I shouldn't wonder if that Shah was over here hadn't something to do with it. Shah of Russia, wasn't it?"

Mr. J.: "No, no, Czar of Russia, and it's Persia you mean—not Russia."

Mrs. J.: "Well, then, Czar of Persia, it's all the same—I don't understand these new-fangled names."—*Fun.*

WAR-SONG OF NATIVE ALLIES.

Run away, run away, run, boys, run,
Nebber stay draw de trigger,
Fly from de enemy's face like fun,
Ebbery blessed nigger!

Go him as fast as foot can go;
Farder dan shot can find us.
Right-about turn, and leabe de foo,
Ebber so far behind us.

Frow away arms like nigger shoud;
Den you run all de lighter.
Big hebbey musket him no good,
'Cept in de hand of fighter.

'Fore one bullet some nigger hit,
Hurt him, or stratch him dyin',
Soon as him got him fourpenny bit,
Den is de time for flyin'.

Wait till no friends commands your rear,
Wot could deir rifles lebble;
Den when you seeat de coast is clear,
Cut away like de double!—*Punch.*

A COMPROMISE.—A lady was recently waited on by a poor woman, who lived in the neighbourhood, and who solicited charity, urging that she had named her children after the lady. "I had understood that the little one was a boy," said the lady. "So it is," said the other. "Certainly, then, you could not have given it my name." "I know it," said the other, "but your name is Augusta, and I named my boy Augustus, which is so near it that I thought you would give me a new frock for him; and I will do without the hat on account of the difference in the last syllable."

The PULPIT, GOLD AND SILVER.—In a letter, lately published, Mr. Bright has expressed some thoughts about sermons which ought to be studied and laid to heart by the great majority of clergymen. It is not the business of Mr. *Punch* to preach sermons, but, if it were, he thinks he should know how to do it. His idea of a sermon is that it should always tell people something which either they did not know or ought to, or knew and would not mind, and tell them nothing not made quite clear to their understanding, in the fewest possible words. When these conditions cannot be fulfilled by a reverend divine would not his best way to attract people to church be to advertise days and hours of services, and post them on his church doors, with the announcement of "No Sermon?"—*Punch.*

JOHN HOPKINS, the wealthiest citizen of Baltimore, whose fortune is estimated at 20,000,000 dollars, died in that city on December 24th aged seventy-nine. He leaves no heirs, and almost all his wealth is devoted to the foundation of an hospital, coloured orphans' home, and University for Baltimore.

PRINCE FREDERICK WILLIAM.—The eldest son of the Crown Prince and Crown Princess of Germany,

Prince Frederick William, who on the 27th ult. was fifteen years of age, is in figure and appearance not so strong as is usual with Hohenzollerns, but he is talented and has been well instructed. The result of a recent examination by the teachers of a Berlin gymnasium was very satisfactory. The prince acquitted himself well in the various branches of instruction for the upper third form, and in mathematics and physics he has already gone beyond the requirements of the form.

TALKING IT OVER.

"How long do you say it is, mother,
Since I drove Zachariah away.
With never a blessing to help him?
Just ten years ago to a day?
And we have been favoured with plenty;
Tis seldom that many enjoy
An easier lot; and I wonder
If the years have gone hard with the boy.

"He was wilful and proud, you remember,
And I was as quick as a flash,
And stern in those days, for I fancied
That boys needed plenty of lash.

I've thought of it over and over,
And grieved not a little for Zach.
Poor boy! do you think he imagines
How my heart has been calling him back?

"For ten long, long years I have carried
A burden of shame and regret;

But if wormwood we drop in the fountain
Then bitter's the draught that we get.
Though seldom we've spoken together
Of this, the one grief of our life,

You never accused me of harshness,
Nor vexed with upbraiding, dear wife.

"The graves that are down by the orchard
Seemed never so narrow and small;

"Twas only our Zach who was spared us,
And grew up so handsome and tall.
Ah! he was a lad to be proud of,
So manly, and honest, and true!

And whenever a man was in trouble
He seemed to know just what to do.

"It must be my sight is much clearer
In these fond and foolish old days,

For I never had one bit of patience
With Zach, nor a word in his praise.

I thought every minute was wasted
He didn't keep steady to work,
And ruled—don't shake your head, mother—

Like some old tyrannical Turk.

"But I have grown older and wiser,
And see, in a sort of amaze,

The many great sins I committed
In those unregenerate days.

And if ever the dear boy should enter
These doors—how my glasses grow dim!—

Right down on my knees I'd go, mother,
A begging forgiveness of him!"

* * * * *

There came a swift step through the entry,

The door was thrown speedily back,
And, flooding the room with his sunshine,

Came the handsome young prodigal, Zach!

No longer the old folks remember

The past, with its sorrows and cares,

But feel that—in talking it over—

Into Heaven they slipped unawares. J. P.

GEMS.

HAD there never been a cloud there had never been a rainbow.

THERE is no joy so great as that which springs from a kind act or pleasant deed; and you may feel it at night when you rest, and through the day about your daily business.

COUNT your very minutes; let no time slip you. Pamper not the body; a youth wants a bridle, not a spur. A fine coat is but a livery when the person who wears it discovers no higher sense than that of a footman. Shun or break off all disputes with inferiors, lest they lose their respect for you. Never reveal thy secrets to any, except it be as much their interest to keep them as it is yours that they should be kept. We seldom repeat talking too little, but very often talking too much.

A NEW COLLEGE.—Archbishop Manning's new college is likely to be in existence before long. It is to be erected at Kensington, near the pro-cathedral, or the "pro," as it is familiarly called. The

Senate will be composed of clergy and laity, the latter being twice as numerous as the former, and including some very distinguished men. The subjects to be taught are modern languages, modern history, constitutional law, physical science in application to certain professional employments, and, above all, a sound course of mental sciences and of the philosophy of religion, with a more complete and scientific treatment of the faith. Mgr. Capel has agreed to become the first principal.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

TREATMENT OF INFANTILE CHOLERA.—Dr. Wertheimer, of Munich, advocates the following means in the above cases: First, the use of a preparation of ammonia for neutralizing in the stomach the excess of acid formed by the fermentation of undigested milk; second, tea, which acts beneficially on cerebral activity, and surely against drowsiness, and which, besides, abates the sickness and diarrhoea. Dr. Wertheimer's favourite prescription is: Decoction of root of salsap, four grains to two ounces of water; liquor ammonia with spirits of aniseed, ten to twelve drops; syrup, one drachm; tincture of opium, two to three drops. One or two teaspoonsfuls every hour, according to the age of the child. The quantity of tincture of opium may be increased if there are no head symptoms. The author considers the disease to be an advanced degree of previous acute gastro-enteritis.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Grand Duchess Marie, it is said, has a dower of 75,000*l.* and 9,000*l.* a year.

The gentleman organ-grinder has accomplished his task; his twelve months are up. He is said to own property at Nobber, county Meath.

IT is stated that Mr. Oppenheim, the accountant, is the donor of the equestrian statue of the Prince Consort on the Holborn Viaduct.

The Sultan of Zanzibar will be one of the London lions this season. He has ordered a steamer, to cost 40,000*l.* for his trip.

It has been resolved to charge a fee of sixpence to persons visiting the wine division of the London International Exhibition this year.

The old iron railings which surrounded St. Paul's Cathedral have just been sold for 350*l.* The original cost of the railings is said to have been 20,000*l.*

BRIGHAM YOUNG PREPARING FOR WAR.—Brigham Young's cannon factory has turned out 28 pieces of artillery, and he has 17,000 stand of arms.

BILLINGSGATE MARKET.—The work of reconstructing this market was commenced recently. It is in the hands of Messrs. Mowlem, and will involve an expense of about 80,000*l.*

It is said that the Duke of Edinburgh will reside for some time every year at Coburg, where a beautiful palace, arranged with English comfort, has been built for him.

A CATALOGUE of the late Duke of Brunswick's jewels is to be published and widely distributed. They will probably be sold by auction, but the Paris mansion will be disposed of by private contract.

MARSHAL BAZAINE is treated with much severity, and no one is allowed to visit him. The Prince de la Moskowa was much surprised to have this permission peremptorily refused.

THE Dowager Lady Briggs, who expired at Brighton the other day in her ninetieth year, resided there for nearly sixty years, and it is a curious fact that she had never quitted the town even for a single day since 1816.

AT Dieppe, in France, the following notice has been issued by the police: "The bathing police are requested, when a lady is in danger of drowning, to seize her by the dress and not by the hair, which oftentimes remains in their grasp."

AN important event in connection with the coal industry of Nottinghamshire is the breaking into the minerals on the Newtons Abbey estate, formerly the property of Lord Byron, and embracing upwards of 5,000 acres of fine coal, as well as iron-stone.

THE Empress Eugénie has addressed a letter to the Bishop of Troyes, with respect to his alleged prohibition of masses for the late Emperor. Her Majesty reminds the prelate that the spirit of charity unites us all, rich or poor, fortunate or unfortunate, the living or the dead.

MR. THOMAS LEADBITTER, late of 7, Staple Inn, one of the oldest solicitors in London, died at his house, in Kensington Garden Square, on the 7th ult., in his eighty-seventh year. Mr. Leadbitter was admitted on the roll in Trinity Term, 1809, and for some years carried on his practice in Bucklersbury, and at the time of his death had consequently been sixty-four years an attorney.

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

ESSIE.—Writing quite legible, but too abundant in loops, twists and needless flourishes. This, however, may be easily rectified.

ETHEL D.—The cure for idleness—a singular question. If a man will not work, neither should he eat. Exercise the will, set vigorously to work, and you will soon conquer indolent habits. These are very evil.

MILICENT H.—1. Order of the publisher. 2. Certainly it is according to etiquette for a gentleman to remove his glove in shaking hands with a lady. He ought indeed (strictly) to do the same in shaking hands even with another man.

ALPHA.—When once a marriage has been legally performed it is altogether legal. Nothing whatever can set it aside. By the way, the old Fleet marriages exceeded in one aristocratic instance the case you mention. However, it cannot be annulled.

G. P.—Particulars of this sort are usually to be found in the commercial columns of the London daily papers. But any newsgazette, especially in the neighbourhood of the Royal Exchange, will readily procure what you ask for.

A. S.—The varnish depends upon the stuff upon which it is to be applied. Tell us for what purpose you require it—for what kind of fabric—and we will then endeavour to tell you. A receipt applicable for one class of goods would not answer for another.

HERBERT.—We cannot undertake to answer questions of this class; and the reason is manifest. If we dealt with affairs of the sort we should have to engage in private or commercially private affairs, and this, you will clearly see, could in nowise be done.

A CONSTANT READER.—Take care of the teeth, and avoid all that is unwholesome in diet, especially late suppers. A lemon, with a little coarse sugar sprinkled upon it, is valuable for the breath; to be taken just before going to bed. This is far the best remedy; but a good deal depends upon the state of the general health.

K. G.—Wash the hair daily. Have it cut very short, and that at frequent intervals. Use also the wash made from rosemary—an infusion of which is easily made by yourself, without any difficulty, or easily procurable. If you are suffering from any debilitated health (as is probable) go to a chemist and get a tonic. Ill health soon affects the hair; hence baldness and like ailments.

INQUIRER.—Can short persons become tall? We know not; that is to say after their attaining due age and due size. But tall persons, *au contraire*, can become short. They stoop invariably as age advances. Any average physiological knowledge would show you the utter absurdity of such a wild supposition. We should certainly be curious to know the proposed means whereby this remarkable transformation claims to be effected.

HAUNZ.—Your legend of Lindensell seems modelled after the late M. G. Lewis. The author of "The Monk" was a man of eminent if erratic genius; but his numerous imitators have seized upon his eccentricities while avoiding his peculiar ability. "Sir Orrie the Lion" or the "Alonzo the Brave" anticipates your production, which we cannot regard as novel, original, nor as highly probable in treatment.

LONDONER.—The two instruments of warfare in use at that time were somewhat different—you seem to confound each with the other in your questions. The halberds throw stones only, but the catapults projected darts, arrows, and javelins as well. Josephus tells us that this latter instrument was capable of producing surprising effects. It has been known to throw stones each equal to a hundredweight, and by their tremendous force battlements were knocked down and whole files of men placed *hors de combat*.

AN ASTRONOMER.—We despair of instructing you how to make a telescope in the few lines which can be placed at your service. It is a modest request truly, and we doubt if the most elaborate treatise on the subject will of itself accomplish the task. Indeed, these instruments are seldom the work of a solitary pair of hands, the different portions being manufactured by special hand-craftsmen. It is necessary, in addition to theoretical knowledge, that you should possess a manual dexterity which you can only acquire by working under the supervision of a skilled artificer.

B. O. F.—At the cessation or expiration of an engagement it is the usual and the correct thing to return presents, letters, etc. Those tokens of endearing recollection must be delivered up quite as rigidly as any merely commercial document. Such is the rigid rule. Get and also return any letters by all means. But no gentleman would say anything to a woman about the actual returnings.

of any little presents. It is all a matter emphatically of taste. Should the lady not quickly do so she is not to be blamed, and only a person of snobbish disposition could say anything in the affair. Let such matters rest, notwithstanding the usual rendering of fond hearts which ought to yearn together.

F. B. W.—The examinations for a writer's post in the Civil Service are quite easy, but of course it depends upon what we denote by that epithet. What is easy for one man is difficult for another. A good English education, accurate spelling, accurate syntactical knowledge of grammar, good writing, and accurate arithmetic, with a modicum of general information would completely suffice. We suppose you are aware that there is a great competition in that department of our service. But where is there not? This is a result of that inordinate over population, as apart from means of living, which is the plague of most Teutonic peoples. Finally, you will get full and exact information by addressing or by applying personally to the Civil Service Commissioners, Cannon Row, Westminster, S.W.

A GOLDEN LOCK.—Your verses indicate an amiable and quite charming disposition, which we greatly admire, and the sentiment is very tender and refined. But the mechanical versification and even the actual rhyming are erroneous. Thus: in the line "is sleeping her long last sleep" there is a syllabic deficiency. You should try to count the regular cadences; your ear, without instruction, should be able to perform that work. Natural melody will teach you, and the process is one of numeration only. "This come" is not grammar; perhaps it was a slip. The perfect tense, we believe, is came. The words send and child do not rhyme. We say these things never to discourage you, but rather as hoping to furnish suggestions. The production may, with a little polishing (limping labor, being filed down, according to Horace, in his Art of Poetry), become very agreeable from a strict critical point of view. We shall be glad to hear from you again.

AROUND THE WINTER FIRE.

We gather 'round the winter fire,
Without the fierce winds blow,
And through the shutter most coldly mutter
A song of the falling snow.

We read the books we loved to read
When we were girls and boys,
And young eyes glisten while young hearts
Listen.

To take that are bright with joys.

We sing the songs we used to sing
In days of old lang syne,
And the swelling chorus a spell throws o'er
us

That seems almost divine.

We look upon the pictures old
That hang against the wall,
And many a pleasure with perfect measure
Their faces do recall.

My hair is growing white with age.
But my heart is warm with mirth,
While we fondly gather in this wintry
weather

'Round our domestic hearth,

To sing the same old songs again,
The same old books to read,
And show that duty and moral beauty
Make home a joy indeed.

The books, the songs, the pictures bright
Were precious things to me
In seasons olden when life was golden,
And precious e'er shall be.

C. D.—EDWARD, twenty-four, 5ft. 8in., of an affectionate disposition, fond of home, and a tradesman, whose income could keep a wife very comfortably.

MAGGIE K., twenty-one, medium height, of a loving disposition. Respondent must be handsome, and affectionate, and a tradesman preferred.

KITTY S., nineteen, medium height, brown hair and eyes. Respondent must be tall, dark, affectionate, and of steady habits.

EMILY, eighteen, blue eyes, dark hair, fair complexion, considered pretty, and is domesticated. Respondent must be tall, dark, and good looking.

C. E. S., tall, dark, good looking, and domesticated, wishes to correspond with a tall, good-looking gentleman, who can keep a loving wife comfortably.

F. A. U., twenty-one, 5ft. 9in., fair, well educated, and in a good position, wishes to correspond with a young lady about eighteen, dark, tall, loving, and accomplished.

MARY M., thirty-one, ladylike, and of musical tastes. Respondent must not be under thirty-five, and must occupy a good position.

A. L. B., twenty, tall, dark hair and eyes, light complexion, loving, and considered good looking. Respondent must be tall, good looking, and affectionate.

LAST ROSE OF SUMMER, forty, medium height, brown eyes, dark brown hair, would like to correspond with a tradesman about forty-seven.

FIREB JACK, a stoker in the Royal Navy, 5ft. 8in., fair, blue eyes, curly hair, and of a loving disposition. Respondent must be not over twenty-two, and fond of home and children.

SMOKEBOX TOM, twenty-five, a stoker in the Royal Navy, 5ft. 7in., hazel eyes, and considered good looking, desires to correspond with a young lady not over twenty-two, who must be fond of home and children.

STEAMPIPE BILL, twenty-five, a stoker in the Royal Navy, 5ft. 8in., black curly hair, blue eyes, and fond of music. Respondent must be not over twenty-two, fond of home and children.

GLADIATOR, twenty-two, medium height, dark, affectionate, fond of music, and possessing an income of 300 per annum. Respondent must be about twenty, pretty, and accomplished.

UNLUCKY BOB, twenty-two, tall, dark, and considered good looking, would like to correspond with a young lady about the same age, who must be good tempered, and fond of home.

EGERTON, twenty-one, tall, dark, well educated, of steady

habits, and in a good situation, desires to correspond with a young lady about nineteen or twenty, who must be accomplished and domesticated.

SUSY B., nineteen, medium height, dark-brown hair and eyes, fair complexion, and of an amiable disposition. Respondent must be about twenty-one, tall, dark, and a tradesman preferred.

SWEET KITTY, twenty-nine, medium height, blue eyes, brown hair, affectionate, and would make a good wife. Respondent must be about thirty, tall, dark, and must hold a good position.

FLO and ALLIE.—"Flo," twenty-two, tall, dark, good looking, good tempered, and loving. Respondent must be tall, dark, and fond of home. "Allie," twenty, medium height, fair, good tempered, and loving. Respondent must be tall, dark, good tempered, and loving. Tradesmen preferred.

LOVELY KATE, eighteen, 5ft. 5in., fair complexion, and brown curly hair, desires to correspond with a young man of a dark complexion, and of a loving disposition; a mate preferred.

SARAH H., twenty-four, tall, brown hair and eyes, and would make a loving wife. Respondent must be about her own age, fond of home and children; an engineer or second mate in the navy preferred.

GEOORGIA, nineteen, medium height, dark hair, deep blue eyes, fair complexion, and of a loving disposition. Respondent must be tall, handsome, and about twenty-one; and must belong to the Royal Navy.

C. D., thirty-six, holding a good position at Hull; a widower with two children; would make a kind husband. Respondent must be between thirty and thirty-five, and fond of home and children.

EUSTACE, twenty-three, 5ft. 10in., brown hair, dark eyes, considered by his friends handsome, and possesses a yearly income of 500. Respondent must be accomplished, domesticated, and must not be more than twenty.

JULIA, twenty-one, short, brown hair and eyes, fair, and loving; sings and plays well, and with an income of 60 per annum. Respondent must be tall, fair, loving, and fond of home; a clerk, or one engaged in a house of business, not over forty, and a Good Templar preferred.

MARTIN HENRY, twenty-two, a non-commissioned officer in the Royal Marines, tall, dark, wishes to correspond with a young lady, who must be good looking, have a moderate education, and be well acquainted with home management.

TOPSAIL SHET, twenty-two, a seaman in the Royal Navy, 5ft. 7in., gray eyes, and considered handsome, desires to correspond with a young lady about the same age, who must be good looking, and thoroughly domesticated.

NELLIE, twenty, 5ft. 2in., good looking, dark hair and eyes, and in a house of business, industries, and would make a loving and good wife. Respondent must be tall, dark hair and blue eyes, good tempered, fond of home; in the navy and a Good Templar preferred.

GEORGE, twenty-one, medium height, in business for himself, with good prospects, dark complexion, generally considered good looking, amiable disposition, fond of home, and musical. Respondent must not be over twenty-three, possessed of means, in good position, good looking, loving, and must understand home management.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

J. A. G. is responded to by—"May."

C. B. by—"Harriet" seventeen, very fair.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP by—"E. G.", thoroughly domesticated, and affectionate.

ALPHONSE by—"Stuart" twenty-four, tall, dark complexion, and considered good looking.

JACOB C. by—"Nellie M." twenty-eight, 5ft. 1in. height, and of amiable disposition.

J. W. by—"Alicia" twenty-five, fair complexion, good looking, and a milliner.

RALPH M. by—"Loving Annie," who possesses agreeable looks and an amiable disposition.

MAUDIE by—"M. N." twenty, 5ft. 3in., dark hair, brown eyes, and a tradesman.

R. C. A. by—"Tommy T." twenty-nine, who thinks he has a good description.

GIRL by—"W. R." twenty-four, tall, blue eyes, and considered good looking.

J. M. by—"W. H. J." who thinks he fairly answers her description.

KATE by—"Egbert" twenty-one, tall, dark, and is in a good situation. To an affectionate wife he would be an affectionate husband.

COSMO AND ALICE by—"Isabel and Lou," ages twenty-one and nineteen, good looking, very loving, fond of home, and both possessing incomes of 1000 per annum.

C. B. by—"Catharine," seventeen, medium height, dark hair, fair complexion, and would make a loving wife.

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